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The Machiavellian Defoe : a study of the influence of popular political thought literature on the propaganda and the fiction of Daniel Defoe.

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**The Machiavellian Defoe:
A Study of the Influence of Popular Political Literature
on the Propaganda and Fiction of Daniel Defoe.**

**By
Jeremy A.D. Tagg**

*Ph.D. Thesis
Department of English
King's College, London
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Abstract of Thesis.

My thesis attempts to show how the proliferation of writing in the late seventeenth century on political intrigue, and on the machinations of French statesmen in particular, had a lasting impact on Defoe's work. It particularly instilled in Defoe a lifelong fascination with the possibility of a slick, apparently infallible tactical manoeuvre, known as a 'masterpiece of policy'.

Chapter One investigates the kinds of political memoirs and manuals which Defoe had encountered in his formative years. Chapter Two demonstrates how Defoe entertained the notion of his political patron Robert Harley acquiring the invulnerable authority of a Cardinal Richelieu, but through a guileful management of factions which would not conspicuously challenge the post-1688 settlement, rather than through the heavy-handed methods of an absolutist state. Defoe struggled to conceal this fantasy in his propaganda, consciously identifying political intrigue not with an aspiring prime minister, but with high-flying factions undermining the government. Chapter Three explores how Harley's fall from power in 1714 encouraged Defoe to give fuller expression to this ideal in his public writing. I particularly focus on *The Secret History of the White Staff*, tracing how those passages in which he rhapsodized about Harley's political ingenuity fuelled a major controversy.

Chapters Four and Five suggest some connections between Defoe's political writing and more familiar fiction. Robinson Crusoe attains the ideal of absolute power with the ready consent of his subjects, which Defoe had earlier envisaged Harley accomplishing. The contrivances through which Moll Flanders and Roxana attempt to secure a lucrative marriage without exposing themselves to censure are often appraised in a manner that recalls Defoe's tributes to Harley's political feats. I conclude that in his

fiction Defoe resumed the practice of sublimating his Machiavellian preoccupations within a narrative, that he had been obliged to adopt as a government propagandist.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

See bibliography for the British Library shelf-marks of primary works.

Backscheider	Paula Backscheider, <i>Daniel Defoe: His Life</i> (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1989)
<i>CJ</i>	Daniel Defoe, <i>The History and Remarkable Life of the Truly Honourable Col. Jacque Commonly call'd Col. Jack</i> (1722), edited by Samuel Holt Monk, The World's Classics (Oxford and New York: OUP, 1989)
<i>Con</i>	Daniel Defoe, <i>The Consolidator; or, Memoirs of Sundry Transactions from the World in the Moon</i> (London: Benj. Bragg, 1705)
Davenant	<i>The Political and Commercial Works of that Celebrated Writer Charles D' Avenant, Ll.D ... collected and revised by Sir Charles Whitworth</i> , facsimile from 1771 edition, 5 vols (Farnborough: Gregg Press, 1967)
Downie	J.A. Downie, <i>Robert Harley and the Press: Propaganda and Public Opinion in the Age of Swift and Defoe</i> (Cambridge: CUP, 1979)
<i>FA</i>	Daniel Defoe, <i>The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe</i> (London: W. Taylor, 1719)
<i>JD</i>	Daniel Defoe, <i>Jure Divino</i> (London, 1706)
Letters	<i>The Letters of Daniel Defoe</i> , edited by George Harris Healey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955)
<i>Mes</i>	Daniel Defoe, <i>Minutes of the Negotiations of Monsr. Mesnager</i> (London: S. Baker, 1717)
<i>MF</i>	Daniel Defoe, <i>The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders, &c.</i> (1722), edited by G.A. Starr, The World's Classics (Oxford and New York: OUP, 1981)

- RC* Daniel Defoe, *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner* (1719), edited by J. Donald Crowley, The World's Classics (Oxford and New York: OUP, 1983)
- Review* *Defoe's Review*, edited by Arthur Wellesley Secord, Facsimile Text Society Publications no. 44, 9 vols, 22 facsimile books (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938)
- Rox* Daniel Defoe, *Roxana, The Fortunate Mistress* (1724), edited by Jane Jack, The World's Classics (Oxford and New York: OUP, 1981)
- SR* Daniel Defoe, *Serious Reflections during the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe: With his Vision of the Angelick World* (London: W. Taylor, 1720)
- WS* Daniel Defoe, *The Secret History of the White Staff*, part I, fourth edition (London: J. Baker, 1714); part II, third edition (London: J. Baker, 1714); part III (London: J. Baker, 1715)

INTRODUCTION

Within the boundaries set by its title, this thesis attempts to address what seem to me to be the most significant and enduring questions that arise from Defoe's biography and literary oeuvre.

Foremost amongst these is the problem of how contemporary or progressive Defoe's outlook was by the time he wrote his novels. In short, are we right to think of a man who turned forty during 1700 as 'an eighteenth-century author'? Before the 1960s, there had seemed to be little disagreement about Defoe's status as the harbinger of British imperialism and mercantile capitalism. In 1958 J.R. Moore could give his biography the cocksure title of *Daniel Defoe: Citizen of the Modern World*. Even by 1968, Isaac Kramnick could devote the best part of a chapter to overstated and under-sourced generalizations about Defoe as 'Walpole's Laureate':

All that Defoe wrote paid tribute to the ideas, institutions, and society that had developed since the Revolution and over which Walpole presided ... Defoe, not Colley Cibber, was the true laureate of the age.

Thankfully, these somewhat panoramic views of Defoe have been superseded by a number of more discriminating readings and investigations. Maximillian Novak, in his *Economics and the Fiction of Daniel Defoe* (1962), first identified Defoe as a more reactionary mercantilist, who believed in the government's duty to ensure 'the balance of trade' in England's favour, and was suspicious of stock-jobbers, projectors and other tokens of laissez-faire economics. *Defoe and the Nature of Man* (1963) argued for Defoe's indebtedness to a diverse body of mostly seventeenth-century writing on the 'natural state' of Man. J. Paul Hunter's *The Reluctant Pilgrim* (1966) and G.A. Starr's *Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography* (1965) and *Defoe and Casuistry* (1971) all located the origins of Defoe's fiction in late seventeenth-century Puritan genres and concerns. In the 1970s, Peter Earle's underrated *The World of Defoe* (1976) reinforced Novak's view of Defoe as

a conservative, rather old-fashioned mercantilist; while Pat Rogers drew attention to a plangent, nostalgic strain in Defoe's seemingly buoyant *Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (also detectable in *The Complete English Tradesman*), that had been suppressed by G.D.H. Cole's determinedly Marxist view of the work as an unqualified paean to a burgeoning age of capitalism.¹

Much of the most original Defoe criticism of the 1980s and 1990s has built on this readiness to question traditional assumptions about Defoe's modernity. Carol Kay, in *Political Constructions* (1988), presents Defoe as 'in many ways a seventeenth-century man of politics, whose interest in natural law and political counsel is informed by his experience of revolutionary conflict over such matters'. He derives from Hobbes and the general political insecurity that characterizes the seventeenth century a fascination with opportunities for consolidating the power of the state and extending his own influence within it. The most drastic revision of the Whig interpretation of Defoe has been undertaken by Manuel Schonhorn in *Defoe's Politics* (1991). He complains of post-war Defoe criticism:

Stressing the modernity of Defoe, it has tended to overlook, even to obscure and misread, a conservative - or traditional - heritage that provided a foundation for his political thought.²

Schonhorn's Defoe is an idiosyncratic royalist, quite out of step with the development of

¹ Isaac Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and his Circle* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 188, 189; see Pat Rogers, 'The Guidebook as Epic: Reportage and Art in Defoe's *Tour*', in *Eighteenth Century Encounters* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1985), pp. 115-50; 'Introduction' to Defoe, *A Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986), pp. 9-34. See bibliography for full publication details.

² Carol Kay, *Political Constructions* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. ix; Manuel Schonhorn, *Defoe's Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 10.

eighteenth-century Whig politics. It is a long way from the 'citizen of the modern world'.

My thesis is certainly indebted to the revisionist strand of Defoe criticism. It aligns itself with the work of Novak, Hunter and Starr in assuming that the mind which Defoe brought to bear on the issues of the early eighteenth century was moulded during the 1680s and 1690s. It follows the structure of, for example, *The Reluctant Pilgrim*, in initially discussing an eclectic body of literature that accumulated in these decades, before demonstrating how Defoe made his own contributions in these modes and eventually incorporated them into his fiction. It particularly situates itself around Schonhorn's argument. His rigid definition of the strong executive power that attracted Defoe, as an Old Testament idea of the warrior-king, depends overwhelmingly upon tracts written during King William's reign. By focusing on Defoe's political writing during Queen Anne's reign and its immediate aftermath, I aim to undermine this specific claim, while corroborating the more general point that the idea of absolute power exercised by an inspired individual held a lifelong appeal for Defoe. But while stressing that Defoe's formative years belong to the seventeenth century, I am not entirely unsympathetic to the view of Defoe as a 'modern', particularly in his politics. One of the curious ironies which this thesis seeks to address is that Defoe's reading of popular political literature from the seventeenth century led him to a political vision that was actually quite prophetic: the kind of political management at which Defoe imagined Robert Harley excelling would in time anchor Robert Walpole (not to mention later prime ministers) in power for much longer than Harley's four turbulent years at the helm.

This brings me to the other major issue which my thesis tackles: the missing link between the Defoe who served Harley as a prolific polemicist and enthusiastic spy, and the Defoe who wrote the novels that have preserved his reputation. For many current commentators, this is simply unimportant. Ian Bell warns against taking Defoe's novels as 'vehicles for personal expression' and attempting to ascribe their 'themes, attitudes and ideas' to Defoe himself: the experience and character of a popular author like Defoe have

less bearing on his fiction than the expectations of his readers, which it seeks to satisfy or attractively subvert. However, even those critics who are most at pains to contextualize Defoe's fiction conclude that it is never entirely subordinate to generic demands. Bell suggests that while Defoe's books are determined by popular genres, 'there is also an attempt to break out of this referential framework, and to produce more independent books': they occupy a twilight zone between schematized and individualized fiction. Lincoln Faller goes further in claiming that the peculiar appeal of Defoe's criminal novels arises from the various ways in which they differ from conventional criminal literature, which would have made reading them both a disconcerting and liberating experience for their contemporary audience.³

While I agree that Defoe's fiction is to some extent written by the popular genres which it exploits, I would maintain that Defoe was still capable of working his own preoccupations into these narratives. Defoe's biography does not reveal him as a natural yes-man. To be sure, he was most comfortable defending the government of the day from its opponents, but he was equally given to voicing strong, idiosyncratic opinions that sometimes left him perilously isolated: his position on Occasional Conformity, which exasperated Dissenters as much as High Tories, is perhaps the supreme example. Defoe's reputation among his contemporaries was that of an incorrigible political loner. John Gay, in his survey of Grub Street, *The Present State of Wit*, identifies various alliances and rivalries amongst the major periodicals, but Defoe's journal appears to stand alone:

The poor REVIEW is quite exhausted, and grown so very Contemptible, that tho' he has provoked all his Brothers of the Quill round, none of them will enter into a Controversy with him.

³ Ian Bell, *Defoe's Fiction* (London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1985), pp. 57, 69; see Lincoln Faller, *Crime and Defoe* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), pp. 29-31, 56-75.

Gay seems to hint that Defoe is simply beyond the political pale as far as his fellow-hacks are concerned. Later, Charles Gildon is able to batten upon Defoe's notoriety as a political outcast to associate him with the fictional castaway that Defoe has created, producing a satire whose title-page mimics that of *Robinson Crusoe* in offering a life of 'Mr. D____l De F____, of London, Hosier, who has Liv'd abve Fifty Years by Himself, in the Kingdoms of North and South Britain'. P.N. Furbank and W.R. Owens have concluded that 'Defoe was a man not only with a fatal attraction to trouble, but with a *penchant* for self-destruction'. Defoe has even been cited as a member of 'God's great awkward squad of unorthodox, dissident Englishmen', a tradition that also embraces Hazlitt, Cobbett and Orwell.⁴ This thesis offers a Defoe who was fascinated by the possibility of acquiring and preserving absolute power and who would have been ill at ease in such libertarian company; but it is still a Defoe who remained stubbornly faithful to a peculiar political outlook that sometimes set him apart from those who might have seemed his natural allies. Such a writer was unlikely to kowtow to literary norms any more than he had toed the line on every political issue.

I would suggest that from the start of Queen Anne's reign a tension existed between Defoe's private opinions and the demands of government propaganda. In his political propaganda under Harley, he attempted to restrain the outspoken interest in the means by which a statesman might strengthen his grip on power which he had voiced in his early correspondence with the minister. But these concerns still occasionally obtruded upon his writing, resulting in works that were more complicated and ambivalent than most

⁴ John Gay, *The Present State of Wit*, edited by Donald Bond, Augustan Reprint Society Publications, series 1, no. 3 (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, 1947), p. 1; [Charles Gildon], *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Mr. D____l De F____, of London, Hosier* (London: J. Roberts, 1719), Title-page; P.N. Furbank and W.R. Owens, *The Canonisation of Daniel Defoe* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 144; Bernard Crick, *George Orwell* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 137.

party propaganda. When Defoe came to write fiction, he continued the practice that had been forced upon him during his years of service under Harley, engrafting his political conceits into the narratives. Just as Defoe's Machiavellian bent had sometimes produced unorthodox, even unsuccessful political propaganda, it was one of the elements that contributed to the divergence of his novels from familiar genres.

Several critics have sensed a vague kinship between Defoe's activities as an undercover agent and the duplicity of his fictional protagonists. David Blewett's observation that 'All his protagonists, from Crusoe to Roxana, are masters of the arts of disguise, of passing themselves off as someone else' is typical of the hazy generalizations that have too often served as a substitute for a more detailed investigation into how Defoe's politics impinge upon his novels. More perceptively, Lincoln Faller remarks on the methods of managing slaves recommended by Colonel Jack to the owner of the Virginia plantation:

Somewhere in Whitehall the King's ministers are 'managing' Jack and other restive Britons (the thought, I'd guess, if not unconscious would have been very close to the surface of Defoe's mind) by the same techniques Jack used to 'manage' *his* Great Master's unwilling, sullen, and potentially rebellious subjects.

But Faller fails to make any connection between Jack's or Crusoe's 'management' of natives and the abundant evidence for Defoe's animated interest in the studied 'management' of political dependents and rivals, to be found, for example, in his early letters to Harley and later secret histories. Instead, Faller retreats to the usual fleeting comparisons between Defoe's manipulative protagonists and the author's own intelligence activities in Scotland at the time of the Union or his infiltration of the Tory *Mist's Weekly Journal* in 1718.⁵

⁵ David Blewett, *Defoe's Art of Fiction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), p. 6; Faller, pp. 195, 196.

I take my cue from a comment made by P.N. Furbank and W.R. Owens in their discussion of the Defoe canon:

Peter Earle has made the simple but true remark that 'The Defoe who wrote the novels seems to be a very different one from the Defoe one gets to know in the rest of his work'. Much of the task of the Defoe critic, indeed, is to search for the true connection between these two Defoes.⁶

I attempt to bring this affinity into sharper focus, offering more specific parallels between Defoe's political writing and his fiction. For instance, Defoe's fascination with the possibility of an infallible, almost elegantly efficient political manoeuvre, with the 'masterpiece of policy' (a seventeenth-century precursor of Joseph Heller's 'Catch-22', though seen through the eyes of authority rather than its victims) seems to me to be one particular thread that can be followed through at least some of Defoe's political writing, to his fiction, and to a late work like *The Political History of the Devil*. If this thesis seems over-dependent on quotation, it is in an effort to move beyond pat analogies between Defoe's biography and the behaviour of his characters, to demonstrate that certain passages in, for example, *The Secret History of the White Staff* and *Moll Flanders* share distinctive phrases and formulae, that derive from popular political literature. Defoe's political works have perhaps only seemed irrelevant to his later fiction because critics have been so reluctant to scrutinize the texts themselves, preferring to summarize them or only discuss their political context.

This thesis is almost as much about Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford as it is about Defoe; or at least the lasting impact which Defoe's long association with the statesman had upon him. Perhaps the only similarity between Defoe and Swift is that the last four years of Queen Anne's reign, in which they both witnessed at close quarters Oxford's often desperate attempts to keep his ministry afloat, and its eventual fragmentation into conspiring factions, continued to preoccupy both writers long after 1714. Each sought to

⁶ Furbank and Owens, *The Canonisation of Daniel Defoe*, p. 146.

identify Oxford publicly with their own diametrically opposed political allegiances: in Swift's case, the Country or Old Whig ideology to which Oxford himself had originally subscribed, and in Defoe's case, a popular Machiavellian notion of the political manager, to which in practice Oxford no doubt occasionally conformed. Oxford obliquely influenced the most celebrated works of both authors, in the sense that they continued to explore in a fictional context the political perspectives from which they had once viewed his government. It has long been recognized that Swift's experiences during 1710-14 inform parts of *Gulliver's Travels*. My thesis attempts to show how Oxford also has a hold on *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders*.

CHAPTER ONE

Machiavellism.

Cardinal *Richlieu* was the most famous for employing Engines among the People to amuse them ... it would be too long to enter into the Particulars, but they are to be seen at large in the History of his Life; the Memoirs of *Rochefort*, and other Authors of those Times.

Review, January 1708.¹

Research into Machiavelli's influence upon both English literature and political thought has generally been confined to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and with good reason. Felix Raab observed that by the post-Restoration period the once controversial idea that in politics 'interest' should override religious or ethical considerations had become generally accepted. Machiavelli continued to be read in new translations, and occasionally a political theorist like Halifax or Bolingbroke would engage with his ideas, but his name was no longer so charged with pejorative connotations. J.G.A. Pocock's ground-breaking work on the group of neo-Harringtonians or 'civic humanists', who moulded the Country ideology that became a significant element in eighteenth-century politics, has shown that Machiavelli was still an important influence during this period. However, this example perhaps only reinforces the impression that by the start of the eighteenth century he was more a figure of academic interest than popular demonology.²

¹ *Review*, IV, 598a.

² See Felix Raab, *The English Face of Machiavelli* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), pp. 226-54; J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 361-505; Pocock, 'Machiavelli, Harrington and English Political Ideologies in the Eighteenth Century', in *Politics, Language and Time* (London: Methuen, 1972), pp. 104-47.

But there is a danger of oversimplification. While Machiavelli's original works, particularly the *Discourses*, had become a respectable political source, there was a welter of popular ideas and catchwords, deriving from French political tracts that were themselves revising Machiavelli, which was much more controversial. As Felix Gilbert has observed, 'the history of Machiavellism is quite as much a history of misunderstandings as a history of the impact of Machiavelli's true ideas'.³ By the start of the eighteenth century, the distinction between Machiavelli and 'Machiavellism' had grown starker than ever. This is best illustrated by authors of the Country persuasion, who cited Machiavelli without a trace of irony, and yet denounced the kind of court politics which might have been considered 'Machiavellian'.

Charles Davenant is one such writer. In his *Essay upon the Probable Methods of Making a People Gainers in the Balance of Trade*, he invokes Machiavelli's notion of the 'corruption' of the state which only a return to first principles can reverse: an idea that was particularly congenial to Country theorists.⁴ He cites Machiavelli when he argues that a system of mixed government guarantees the stability that is essential to commercial prosperity. Under absolutism, a nation can never be certain about how the monarch's successors will govern: the process of corruption always remains a possibility. Later in the essay, Machiavelli lends authority to his warnings against allowing an ancient constitution (as Country authors saw the balance of power between the Crown, Lords and Commons in England) to be undermined, whether by the monarch or the people.⁵

But elsewhere Davenant questions the popular confusion of deviousness with political sophistication and exposes the pretentious language in which such accounts are

³ Felix Gilbert, 'Machiavellism', in *History: Choice and Commitment* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1977), p. 176.

⁴ See Pocock, 'Machiavelli, Harrington and English Political Ideologies etc.', pp. 131-2.

⁵ Davenant, II, 337, 366.

written. In his discussion 'Of Ministers of State', in *Essays upon Peace at Home, and War Abroad*, Davenant contrasts the virtue of Henry IV of France with 'that dark cunning which lurked in the subtle head of Lewis the eleventh'.

The deep reaches of policy, so much applauded in some kings, have generally tended more to the hurt than good of human kind: in those dark caverns and recesses of the brain are often forged the chains of bondage; and as, in relation to private men, honesty will in the end be always found the best policy, in the same manner, as to princes, true honesty ought to be accounted the sublimest part of wisdom.

Later in this section, he asks what good 'the fine-spun Italian policies' of Catherine de Medici, which were passed on to her son Henry III of France, or 'the deep-laid councils' of Philip II of Spain have actually brought those countries. While both kings are 'celebrated for great politicians', in reality their empires declined under their rule. These examples

prove how little there is in these subtle policies or King-craft. Each had it in a large degree, and yet it mislead them both; from whence may be justly argued, that to love their people, and to consult their welfare, is in Princes the highest, and carries along with it all the other parts of wisdom.⁶

Davenant seeks to equate political wisdom not with the mystification of government, but with integrity and public spirit. He seems to be satirizing the tendency to portray certain politicians as 'Machiavellian'. One contemporary author who was more attached to this perception of politics was Daniel Defoe.

Manuel Schonhorn has seen Machiavelli as irrelevant to Defoe's politics, rightly observing that there is little evidence of such a debt in his work. But Defoe could still have been 'Machiavellian' in outlook. Schonhorn admits that Defoe 'naturally echoed the proverbial content of the advices-to-princes genre of secular tradition', but insists that his attachment to a Biblical notion of the warrior-king meant that he was unable to 'dislodge political wisdom from martial prowess'. This thesis seems to me to be much less tenable after King William's reign: Schonhorn himself admits that Defoe later attached himself to a

⁶ Davenant, V, 32, 32, 35, 35, 35, 35-6.

secular 'statesman-politician', Robert Harley, scarcely a messianic warrior-king. As I will attempt to show, the corpus of Machiavellian literature was more varied and its influence on Defoe more lasting than Schonhorn's cursory reference to 'the advices-to-princes genre' suggests.⁷

Defoe began writing the *Review* in February 1704, apparently under the auspices of his new employer Harley, with the initial motive of defending the ministry's policy of continued war against France. But it is clear from the first issue that Defoe saw it as an opportunity for a detailed history of the rise of France from Henry IV to the present King, Louis XIV, particularly concentrating on the dominant individuals of that period. I would argue that far from simply rehearsing the 'official' view of France, as J.A. Downie has suggested, Defoe was pursuing a more personal project that increasingly threatened to divert the journal from its propagandistic purpose during its first six months. His approach to the subject almost invited controversy.⁸

An interest in recent French history, and particularly in the relative advantages and disadvantages of the French and English political systems, was not unique to Defoe nor inevitably contentious. At several points in his *Essays*, Davenant compares the stability of absolutist France with the turbulence experienced by England during the seventeenth century. In his *Essay upon Universal Monarchy*, he remarks on France's avoidance of civil war during the reigns of Louis XIII and XIV:

France was all the while under a strong government, because, though factions did now and then prevail a little, in the main the reins were held by the unerring and

⁷ Schonhorn, pp. 6-8, 19; for a more inclusive definition of Machiavellian literature, see Gilbert, pp. 170-1.

⁸ See Downie, pp. 65-6; for evidence of the controversy surrounding the early issues, see Backscheider, pp. 152-5; *Letters*, p. 26; *Review*, I, Preface, 145a, 153a-55b. I tend to agree with Furbank and Owens's view that Defoe is propounding a typically 'cussed' thesis about France during the early months of the *Review*: *The Canonisation of Daniel Defoe*, pp. 143-4.

severe hands of Richelieu and Mazarin; and they must be Kings highly qualified indeed, and such as are not seen every age, who know how to rule a people so well as these cardinals did during their administration.

France offers an enviable example of uninterrupted, efficient government and sustained prosperity, and even its most notorious ministers are given their due. Richelieu's *Political Testament* appears alongside Machiavelli to support Davenant's Country views. But these principles also demand that he should qualify his respect for French achievements. After the passage above, he observes that while France is an example of a successful absolutism, 'no government can be truly called wise, that has any other view but the liberty and happiness of the people'. His praise for the two French ministers is usually balanced by condemnation of the system in which they excelled. In *An Essay upon the Probable Methods*, Richelieu is seen as a gifted politician, personally responsible for France's growth in wealth and influence, but also as an agent of her 'corruption' into a tyranny, a process which England must be careful to avoid.

But here it may be objected, that Richlieu, who was undoubtedly one of the greatest men that ever undertook the guidance of a state, and who had very near all the good qualities necessary for one to whom the reins of empire are committed, did, notwithstanding, lie under continual accusations, popular anger, and conspiracies against his person. To which we answer, that this cardinal was a good minister for the French King, but not for France. He had all along designs to make his Master absolute. It is true, he endeavoured, by his sagacity, care, and deep foresight, to make the French as great and happy as a country can possibly be under an unlimited dominion: However, his foundation was not sound at bottom, nor honest to human kind: He was therefore, from time to time, harassed, interrupted, and perplexed by the few good patriots that remained, who had still an eye towards their constitution.⁹

The emphasis is on how the injustice of the political system, in which he exercises his undeniable talent, ensures that there is a steady current of Country opposition. Davenant is always at pains to distinguish between admiration for the political prudence of Richelieu and Mazarin, and abhorrence of the arbitrary government which they helped to establish.

⁹ Davenant, IV, 25, 25; II, 376-7.

At the Grub Street end of the scale, the Whig hack John Oldmixon offers a less discriminating judgement on Richelieu and Mazarin. In his *Arcana Gallica: or, The Secret History of France*, Richelieu and Mazarin are held responsible for the indelibly 'Machiavellian' character of French politics. Unlike Davenant, Oldmixon makes no attempt to distinguish between Machiavelli and the subsequent corruption of his thought.

The Two Cardinal Ministers went so far in establishing the Politicks of Matchiavel, and compelling other Courts to fall in with the same Principles and Practices, that sure all good English Men cannot but have an Abhorrence for every Thing that's French in Religion and Policy.

He goes on to concede that Richelieu was a skilful politician, but this does not prevent him demonizing the minister. Louis XIII's was

A Reign full of Intrigues and Actions under the Direction of a Minister of as a great Genius as ever France or any other Kingdom produc'd. One who tho' he had a sublime Capacity, and was not for want of Ability to Act openly, reduc'd to the Scandalous necessity of Tricking; yet of so unbounded an Ambition, that there was no Artifice so mean and so wicked which he wou'd not put in Practice to carry his Point; and when he dy'd he seem'd to have infus'd his Soul into Mazarine his Successor, whose Genius, however, was not of so large an extent as Richlieu's, but consisted more in Italian Refinement, than the Wise Politicks of an experienc'd Statesman.¹⁰

To some extent Oldmixon shares Davenant's desire to expose the dishonesty and crude force behind the mystique which popular histories have bestowed upon certain politicians; but Davenant has too much respect for the French ministers to use them as his examples.

Defoe's reflections on French politics in the *Review* during 1704 do not conform neatly to either of these approaches. There is something of Davenant in his account of how the French surpass the English in 'the Unanimity and Policy of their Councils' and 'the Exactness and Punctual Execution of their Orders'. But a lip-smacking relish for the sheer ingenuity of French politicians, which is absent from Davenant's more judicious assessment, soon enters Defoe's account; and this sets him even further apart from

¹⁰ [John Oldmixon], *Arcana Gallica*, pp. iii, v.

Oldmixon. Henry IV is described as one 'Particularly qualified both for the Contriving as well as Executing Vast and Inimitable Designs', who 'brought himself to such a Mastership of his Prodigious Designs, as that he firmly resolv'd to put them in Execution'. Defoe continues in more startling terms:

In the Reign of his Son, they were persued by the most exquisite Master of Politicks, Cardinal *Richelieu*, whose Life and Management may hereafter take up a considerable part of these Papers ... Ever since the Death of *Hen. IV.* the *French* Affairs have been under the most exact Conduct in the Hands of the most refined States-men in the World; together with two Queens of most admirable Management, Women of uncommon Spirits as to Government, and most incomparable Politicks. Among these States-men are reckon'd the Cardinals *Richlieu* and *Mazarine*, Moneur [sic] *Colbert*, *Lovois*, *Ponchartrain*, &c. These are the Steps of Policy, by which the *French* has risen to that Prodigy which now the whole World wonders at.

He goes on to declare 'that there are some of the greatest Master-pieces of Management visible in the Affairs of *France* that can in any Age be parallel'd'.¹¹ Defoe portrays French politicians in exactly the distorted manner which Davenant rejects. He seems to be rehearsing the same distinctive, mock-aesthetic vocabulary ('exquisite', 'exact', 'refined', 'Master-pieces'), which, we infer from both authors, has been vulgarly applied to political exploits. But Defoe gleefully brandishes these terms, rather than citing them only to expose them. He appears to be breezily adopting a popular literary mode which has already gained some notoriety.

Defoe leaves a number of clues to the kinds of sources which inform his treatment of French politics. In the *Review*, he cites the 'Count *de Rochefort* in his Memoirs', and quotes from a 'Hist. of *Card. Richlieu*'. In an issue towards the end of the *Review*'s period of absorption in the subject of France, he makes the following general comments:

The *Brigues*, the Intrigues she has manag'd in the Councils and Courts of her Neighbours are so many, have such an infinite Variety, and have been manag'd with so much Fineness of Policy, such Foresight and Address, that I assume no

¹¹ *Review*, I, 10, 10, 11, 11, 12, 14.

Historian in the World is able to give a compleat account of them ... To write a History of them would be to dive into the Inscrutable Councils of Cardinal *Richlieu* and *Mazarine*, and abstract the Journals of Messieurs *Colbert* and *Louvois*. The *French* Policies have been laid too deep, and these Eminent Ministers of State dealt too much in the Clouds, to have their Measures dissected or describ'd by the Historians, or so much as copied by Posterity.

Here, Defoe's fascination is as much with the challenge of writing about French court intrigue as the substance of that politics. He alludes to primary sources for the maxims by which French ministers governed, and implies that popular histories of the period have been attempted. However much Defoe denies the possibility of tracing their sinewy machinations, his view of these ministers is evidently shaped by literary sources of one kind or another. The impression that Defoe's political standards derive from his reading is reinforced by several passing remarks in his long memorandum to Harley of July-August 1704.

Sir Francis Walsingham, Tho' Not a Prime Minister, yet if we Read his Story ...

It Reminds me of a Book in Eight Volumes Published in London about 7 or 8 yeares Ago Call'd Letters writ by a Turkish Spye-- The books I Take as They Are, a Meer Romance, but the Morall is Good, A Settl'd Person of Sence and Penetration, of Dexterity and Courage, To Reside Constantly in Paris ...

Cardinall Richlieu, was the Greatest Master of This Vertue That Ever I Read of, in the World ...¹²

For Defoe, even an account that is patently fictional can afford examples and models to be emulated by a contemporary politician. Both the *Review* and his letters to Harley during 1704 suggest that Defoe's reading had already stimulated a fascination with the more infamous statesmen of the past and a boyish enthusiasm for political intrigue, which were whetted by his sudden intimacy with a government minister. I will look at the memorandum more closely in the next chapter. First, it is necessary to disinter the kind of

¹² *Review*, I, 82a, 149b-150a, 185b-186a; *Letters*, pp. 30, 38, 39. Defoe mentions exactly the same two sources, the 'History' of Richelieu's 'Life' and 'the Memoirs of *Rochefort*' when he returns to the subject of French politics four years later in the *Review*: see the quotation at the head of this chapter, from *Review*, IV, 598a.

books to which Defoe alludes and from which he acquired exactly the Machiavellian slant on politics which Country authors like Davenant sought to discredit.

Literature about French politics, whether written originally in English or translated from French, proliferated in England between the 1660s and 1700s, and particularly after England went to war with the country on King William's accession in 1688. Although many of the English works on the subject are concerned with the causes of France's rapid growth in power, a scarcely concealed appetite for political intrigue is also apparent. The titles alone betray their ambivalent attitude to French politics:

A Brief Display of the French Counsels Representing the Wiles and Artifices of France, in order to Ruine the Confederates.

The Present Policies of France and the Maxims of Lewis XIV, Plainly Laid Open; Detecting the Management of his Intrigues against the Princes and States of Europe.

The Secret Intreagues of the French King's Ministers at the Courts of Several Princes, for the Enslaving of Europe.

The Preface to the last example promises '*a Compendium of most of the Artifices and cunning Contrivances of the French Court for several Years last past*'. The posture is hostile but the tone is one of enthusiastic voyeurism.

However, the character of this literary boom had perhaps been set during the 1620s and 1630s in France itself, where the notion of 'reason of state' was debated in a number of tracts. Although the phrase had never been used by Machiavelli, these authors were attempting to qualify his secularized view of politics and define a 'good' reason of state which would not transgress Christian morality to the extent that Machiavelli's work had done in their view.¹³ But the effect of these tracts, once published and translated, was perhaps only to develop the myth of the calculating statesman resorting to cunning to

¹³ See William Church, *Richelieu and Reason of State* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 44-80.

preserve himself in power. Many of the skills and attributes which would later be bestowed upon Richelieu and Mazarin in popular accounts of their careers are sketched in these earlier, more scholarly commentaries.

For example, the Duke de Rohan's *Treatise of the Interest of the Princes and States of Christendom* depicts Henry IV of France accomplishing a feat of delicate diplomacy that neutralizes the threat of civil war and consolidates his position:

There behooved a great dexteritie to demeane himselfe discretely both towards the *Catholicks*, and the *Protestants*, incensed one against the other by so long and bloody Civill warres ... His businesse now was, to preserve his *old* friends, and not to loose the new. He promiseth the one not to refuse instruction: and continues with the other, in the exercise of his *Religion*. In the meane while, hee serves his owne turne of both together, to fight against his enemies.¹⁴

A vocabulary for celebrating successful manoeuvres ('dexteritie', 'discretely') is already emerging, via English translation. The idea of exploiting political divisions is common in such tracts. Philippe de Béthune, in his *Counsellor of Estate*, similarly advises a prince to keep neighbouring allies at odds with one another, but still all on friendly terms with his own nation.

He must consider of the meanes how he may with dexterity nourish the distrusts and jealousies which are, or may be betwixt them; But he must be warie hee bee not knowne to be the Authour ... Hee must seeke with all diligence to mollifie the most powerful, by faire deportuments and promises, and sometimes to pacifie the one, and sometimes the other, as well to make them the more negligent, as to labour in seeking them severally to cast them into some distrust one of another.¹⁵

He must keep his allies divided, so as to control them the better, but never allow his mask of disinterested goodwill to slip. The importance of a prince upholding his good reputation is often stressed in these works. Above all, they value subtlety and circumspection above

¹⁴ Duke de Rohan, *A Treatise of the Interest of the Princes and States of Christendome* (London: Ric. Hodgkinsonne, 1641), part II, 23-4. For Rohan, see Friedrich Meinecke, *Machiavellism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957), pp. 163-93.

¹⁵ [Phippe de Béthune], *The Counsellor of Estate* (London: Nicholas Okes, 1634), pp. 221-2; For Béthune, see Church, pp. 279-82.

courage and force in a statesman. An ability to anticipate challenges and dangers matters more than a readiness to deal with them efficiently once they arise. Jean de Silhon, in his *Minister of State*, which is dedicated to Richelieu, ranks valour below 'more silent and concealed operations', that are more beneficial to prince and public alike.

To foresee th'evills which may befall a State; to prepare preservatives to hinder their growth; to suppress the Causes before they have produced their Effects, are things very little considered: And yet a greater Obligation is due to a Physitian, that preserves the Health from all sorts of Alteration, than to him that restores the health when it is lost; A greater Debt is due to him that hinders a person from falling, than to him that draws him from a precipice; And 'tis a better and more difficult thing to preserve a State, than to Conquer it.¹⁶

These tracts often give the impression that government is primarily a matter of surmounting difficulties and meeting ever greater challenges. A statesman is not expected to take the easiest route, but impress posterity with his foresight and ingenuity.

Other authors linked 'reason of state' with the classical idea of the 'arcana imperii', suggesting that the artifices disclosed in their pages were part of an ancient, esoteric body of knowledge intended only for a select group of initiates. Gabriel Naudé develops the idea of the sovereign's superiority to the fickle masses and his capacity to use a supernatural aura for political ends. In his widely influential *Political Considerations upon Refin'd Politicks*, which appeared in an English translation in 1711, Naudé introduces the 'master-stroke of state': a seemingly miraculous intervention in the regular process of public affairs, without need of warning or justification, through which a ruler stabilizes the state at a time of crisis. He describes them as

Bold and extraordinary Actions, which Princes are constrain'd to execute when their Affairs are difficult and almost to be despair'd of, contrary to the common Right, without observing any Order or Form of Justice, but hazarding particular Interest for the good of the Publick.

¹⁶ Jean de Silhon, *The Minister of State*, 2 vols (London: Thomas Dring, 1658), I, 42. For Silhon, see Church, pp. 261-8, 431-6.

Their essential characteristic is that they cannot be anticipated or comprehended by others. They may even deceive their intended targets into believing that they are the agents rather than passive victims of the contrivance.

In these *master strokes of State*, the Thunderbolt falls before the Noise of it is heard in the Skies ... Prayers are said before the Bell is rung for them; the Execution precedes the Sentence; he receives the Blow that thinks he himself is giving it; he suffers who never expected it, and he dies that look'd upon himself to be the most secure.

In keeping with other 'reason of state' writers, Naudé emphasizes that these measures are more pre-emptive than openly hostile: 'upon the defensive, and not the offensive, to preserve, and not to make ones self great, but to fence off Surprise, Deceits and Villanies, rather than to commit them ... It is permitted to counterplot what is plotted against us, and to play the *Fox* with old *Reynard*'. It is as if something more than political effectiveness is demanded from the 'master-stroke'. It should be employed sparingly:

Experience teaches us, that all such things as are wonderful and extraordinary are not seen every Day, Comets don't appear but at the distance of some Ages ... and this uncommonness of the Appearance gives a Lustre and Beauty to abundance of things which suddenly lose it when they become too frequent.¹⁷

Such aesthetic criteria were to remain closely associated with the idea of the 'master-stroke' in the public mind.

The popular, sometimes rather sensational accounts of recent French politics, that proliferated both in France and England during the closing decades of the seventeenth century, traded on the ideas of Naudé and other serious political commentators. Richelieu, Mazarin and their successors were presented as acquiring and preserving power through contrivances that displayed just the subtlety that 'reason of state' tracts had prescribed. The key episodes in their careers were often appraised with mock discrimination.

¹⁷ Gabriel Naudé, *Political Considerations upon Refin'd Politicks* (London: H. Clements, 1711), pp. 59, 59-60, 69, 70-1. For Naudé, see Donaldson, *Machiavelli and Mystery of State* (Cambridge: CUP, 1988), pp. 141-85; Meinecke, pp. 197-204.

The Life of the Famous Cardinal-Duke de Richelieu, the biography to which Defoe alludes in the *Review*, is perhaps one of the more responsible examples; but the work still depicts Richelieu rising to power and rendering his position as chief minister invulnerable through a canny management of his political patrons and rivals. The young Bishop of Lucon exploits the competition between various nobles to his own advantage:

He dexterously manag'd the hatred which different Parties had one for another, and as far as in him lay balanc'd their Power, out of a consideration, that if one of these Factions destroy'd the other, it would be his own Fate to fall under the same weight.

He continues to equip himself for any political eventuality, by diligently currying favour with both the exiled Queen Mother, Mary de Medici, and the young King Louis XIII: 'to put himself in a Capacity to make the best Advantage of an Accomodation; whatever it was'. He makes himself the linchpin of the Treaty of Angouleme between the two factions, though, in reality, he 'had trick'd both Parties', as the Treaty obliges the King to admit him to the Privy Council and to request that the Pope make him a Cardinal, while the Queen suffers the removal from office of some of her favourites, and has to return to the court.¹⁸

Once the King has been made firmly dependent on him, Richelieu gradually forces him to choose between the Queen and his chief minister, repeatedly concealing his ambition behind a feigned reluctance to be the cause of such a breach and a professed intention to retire, which only renew the King's attachment to him. Richelieu's speech to the Cabinet Council on the question of the Queen's banishment is the central episode in the book. He tactfully focuses on the Queen's cabal rather than the Queen herself as a threat to the King's survival and national concord, before raising the Queen's removal as one of several possible expedients. He claims that he will public-spiritedly take the burden of the

¹⁸ *The Life of the Famous Cardinal-Duke de Richelieu*, 2 vols (London: M. Gillyflower, 1695), I, 5, 22, 44.

controversy that is bound to follow. Richelieu succeeds in disguising the elimination of his rivals as a public act of self-sacrifice. He maintains

that if he had no regard but for himself, he would never have resolved to propose this Expedient, because all the world would believe that he acted for Vengeance, whilst he did nothing but what was for the good of the State, and that they would make a thousand Satyrs against him.

Richelieu essentially pursues this policy of unostentatiously removing potential enemies for the rest of his life, ensuring that his position as the King's chief minister is never seriously threatened. As the author explains at the end of the book,

To hinder his Majesty from being prejudic'd against him, before he could be able to justifie himself, he took care to remove all those persons from about him whom he in the least suspected, and only left such near him as depended absolutely upon himself.¹⁹

The manoeuvres attributed to Richelieu in this account enact many of the methods discussed in the 'reason of state' tracts. From an early stage Richelieu ensures his future prosperity by courting opposing factions, even playing them against each other to his own gain. He anticipates any challenge to his position by rooting out of office all but his closest dependents. He doggedly pursues his own interest but preserves the appearance, at least in the King's eyes, of a selfless public servant. Techniques which once appeared in the more academic discourses of Silhon and Naudé now provide entertainment in more popular histories exploiting the notoriety of certain statesmen.

Another example of the way the French ministers were being portrayed for the amusement of a wider readership is Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato's *The History of the Managements of Cardinal Julio Mazarine*. The language in which Mazarin's manoeuvres are described was fast becoming conventional in such works. For example, this description of his early aptitude for diplomacy:

¹⁹ Ibid., I, 371; II, 378.

Mazarine continuing a Mediator between each party, demean'd himself with such exquisite Sagacity, and with so sweet a manner of Negotiating, sometimes with one, sometimes with another, that he rendred himself equally beloved and confided in by all; and continuing by Play and Familiarity to acquire every ones Friendship [sic], he came at length to penetrate into the most hidden Caballs, and to discover the most secret Designs.

Behind the appearance of a conciliatory go-between amongst the various parties, Mazarin is able to acquire advance knowledge of all their designs, so that he can forestall imminent challenges from any quarter. Subsequently, he plays two particular rivals against each other, and then reaps the credit for their reconciliation.

With admirable subtilty he raised a glorious Envy betwixt the Dukes of *Orleans* and *Anguien*, enticing the former to the Incommodities of Warre ... by this means making use of the Triumphs of the one, to moderate the haughtiness of the other, which was one of his greatest Artifices, to enjoy the benefit of a well-concerted Union.

Later, when he grows suspicious of his friend the Prince of Conde, he has him apprehended without disturbing his reputation for generosity:

Mazarine this notwithstanding was so much his Crafts master in dissimulation, and so well feigned himself a stranger to any such resolution, that finally with a most subtil artifice he so wrought, that the Prince himself prepared the Guards, under pretext to imprison one Couturer, and became instrumental to his own imprisonment.²⁰

The manoeuvre has the hallmark of the 'masterpiece': Mazarin has contrived matters so that the Prince seems to be entirely responsible for his own downfall, while he, the real moving force behind the scheme, appears detached and blameless. Typically, the description of the episode displays both a connoisseur's relish and a critic's close analysis.

Colbert, along with Louvois and Pontchartrain, was generally viewed as the natural successor to Richelieu and Mazarin during Louis XIV's reign and received similar treatment to the earlier ministers in popular biographies. *The Life of the Famous John*

²⁰ Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato, *The History of the Managements of Cardinal Julio Mazarine* (London: Daniel Brown, 1691), pp. 14-15, 46, 71. An earlier edition of this translation had appeared in 1671.

Baptist Colbert, originally written by Gatien de Courtilz de Sandras, who I will come to in a moment, places emphasis on the minister's conscientious cultivation of an appearance quite contrary to his underlying ruthlessness:

He was a great Pretender to Probity; but tho' he endeavour'd to persuade the World that he neglected his own Interest, and seem'd resolv'd to owe his Riches merely to the King's Bounty, he scrupl'd not to fill his Coffers by indirect Methods. He affected a great deal of Moderation in the beginning of his Ministry; but as soon as he saw his Fortune secur'd by great Offices and powerful Alliances, he gave a full Career to his vast Designs, and spar'd nothing to advance his Glory, tho' he manag'd his private Affairs with a great deal of Frugality. He sacrific'd Honour, Integrity, Gratitude, and every thing else to the Interests of his Ambition ... But though he never employ'd his Power for the good of others, it must be acknowledg'd that he never shed the Blood of his Enemies. He was crafty and subtil: His outward Behaviour was modest, accompanied with a great deal of seeming Plainness and Simplicity. He lov'd, and was acquainted with ingenious Arts.²¹

Colbert advances his own interest as unobtrusively and inoffensively as 'reason of state' manuals had suggested that a minister should proceed in the greater interests of the state.

Although many of these biographies of leading French statesmen purported to be authoritative histories, they were clearly often tailoring certain episodes to the formulae suggested by works such as Naudé's. A life of Mazarin was apparently more marketable if it encompassed a series of political 'masterpieces', lingered over appreciatively by the author. Once their guile had been exaggerated and marvelled at to satisfy a popular audience, these ministers inevitably began to appear as characters in more overtly fictional works.

The career of Gatien de Courtilz de Sandras epitomizes the development of political literature in France during the seventeenth century. He began by writing a serious political commentary along the lines of Rohan's manual, entitled *Nouveaux Intérêts des Princes d'Europe*, but went on to produce spurious 'political testaments' of Colbert and

²¹ [Gatien de Courtilz de Sandras], *The Life of the Famous John Baptist Colbert* (London: R. Bentley, 1695), pp. 2-3.

Louvois, and a host of sensational memoirs in which the protagonists brush shoulders with the leading French ministers of the day. Arthur Secord has even suggested that Defoe may have taken him as a literary model: 'Sandras preceded Defoe, and several of his important works had been translated into English at the time when Defoe was much interested in French affairs and French literature'.²² Courtilz de Sandras's wrote *The Memoirs of the Count de Rochefort* which Defoe cites in the *Review*. There are also grounds for believing that he read *The French Spy, or the Memoirs of John Baptist de la Fontaine*, which appears in a catalogue that includes Defoe's library, as it stood at his death. The catalogue admittedly has only a limited value, as it compounds Defoe's books with those belonging to one Philip Farewell, but in this case Defoe's certain acquaintance with the Rochefort memoir makes it highly probable that he would have possessed another work by the same author.²³

In *The Memoirs of the Count de Rochefort*, the narrator describes how he became Richelieu's most trusted agent, and his tales of delivering baggages to disguised figures, or carrying letters written in cyphers, bear out the minister's reputation for an almost gratuitous secrecy. But after Richelieu's death, Rochefort fails to develop a similar relationship with Mazarin, who is portrayed as the more slippery politician. The memoir includes reflections on the strategies of these ministers, in the manner of the popular accounts of their lives, but from the more personal perspective of one who has witnessed these contrivances at close quarters. For example, Rochefort unravels Mazarin's means of securing the Regency for the Queen Mother, when Louis XIII is close to death:

²² Arthur Secord, 'The Origins of Defoe's *Memoirs of a Cavalier*', in *Robert Drury's Journal and Other Studies* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1961), pp. 83-4. See also Maximillian Novak, *Defoe and the Nature of Man* (London: OUP, 1963), p. 142. For Courtilz de Sandras generally, see Benjamin Woodbridge, *Gatien de Courtilz, Sieur du Verger* (Baltimore and Paris: John Hopkins Press, 1925); Meinecke, pp. 244-56.

²³ See *The Libraries of Daniel Defoe and Philip Farewell*, edited by Helmut Heidenreich (Berlin: im Selbstverlag, 1970), p. 59, no. 942.

'Twas a Master-piece of Policy in the Cardinal, after having put by the Queen, from those methods she had taken so much to her advantage, to find out other ways to secure the Regency to her. He feared Monsieur *Desnoirs* most, who was Secretary for the War, and would have been glad to have him remov'd, and yet made use of him to make the proposal to the King, and he had two designs in so doing: first, if the King consented to make the Queen Regent, then he had effectually oblig'd her, as being the first contriver of it; but if the King should resent it ill and fly out into a passion at it, then 'twould disgrace his Adversary.

Mazarin is motivated not so much by the desire to see the Queen established as Regent, as to win her esteem for contriving this. He removes her closest rival not through outright opposition, but by making him the instrument of his design. If the scheme backfires, Mazarin is shielded by Desnoirs from the King's disapproval, and if it succeeds, he still takes the credit from the Queen. Rochefort at one point explains that these analyses of the stratagems of Richelieu, Mazarin or Colbert's father, Monsieur de Tellier, are not needless digressions from his story:

I ought to give an Idea of those, which manag'd the Government, to shew that such Master-pieces of Policy, could not proceed from any Persons, but such as were perfectly verst in the nicest affairs of State.²⁴

The work is partly intended to allow the reader a ringside view of the most adroit political performers at work.

This is even more the case in *The French Spy*, where the narrator finds himself on the receiving end of Louvois's manoeuvres. In England, on his own initiative, the narrator, John Baptist de la Fontaine deceives King William's court into believing that he will work as their agent abroad, and is sent to Poictou to rally the French Protestants there in preparation for an offensive against France. This return to France enables him to inform the French King and his ministers, and brings him in contact with Louvois. He becomes aware that the minister is considering whether it might not be in France's interest to

²⁴ [Courtilz de Sandras], *The Memoirs of the Count de Rochefort* (London: F.L., 1696), pp. 102, 106.

tolerate rather than punish these Protestants, and to make an example of the double agent who provided the information, or at least evade any obligation to reward him:

to make me a Sacrifice to save many others; or else out of a piece of Policy, to divert me from making any farther account, upon what I might reasonably pretend to have deserved at his hands, for the Service I had done.

Fontaine becomes a casualty of 'reason of state', as the minister decides that it is more advantageous to the government to imprison him in the Bastille, than to punish a number of recalcitrant Protestants. This has the effect of indirectly warning the Protestants of the government's knowledge of their activities, and putting Fontaine in a position of abject dependence. It is only in retrospect that he realizes

that this Minister did use me thus, with no other intent than to tire out my Patience, and make me do something or other in my Passion, which might furnish him with a fair pretext to send me to Prison; not being willing to let the World, or my self understand that it was upon the score of the publick Interest that he was sending me to those Lodgings, he was preparing for my Reception.²⁵

The narrator's own fate illustrates the inscrutability of Louvois's designs.

Another example of how the French ministers were in demand as subject-matter for popular literature is the eight volume *Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy*, which Defoe mentions in his memorandum to Harley. The general Preface advertises the author's treatment of 'Court-Intrigues, *Junto's* of Politicians, and Subtle Proposals of Statesmen', and how 'he watches the Motions of *Cardinal Richlieu, Mazarini, Olivares*, and other Great Ministers of State'. The Preface to the second volume boasts that it includes '*many French Intrigues and Court-Policies, which would never have come to Light, had it not been for this subtle Arabian*'. The Preface to the third attests to the popularity of the books and assures the reader that in the latest, 'He brings along with him many Foreign Commodities, to gratifie the Various Expectations of People'. The books are continually attempting to stimulate the demand for works offering insights into statecraft, and posit a

²⁵ [Courtilz de Sandras], *The French Spy* (London: R. Basset, 1700), pp. 227, 278.

tradition of kindred statesmen, that includes Richelieu, Mazarin, the Spanish ministers Olivares and Ximenes, and Cromwell. The author generalizes about them as Machiavellian:

Most of the *European Statesmen*, are corrupted with the *Maxims* of a certain Famous *Writer* whom they call *Matchiavel*. This *State-Casuist* has taught them, to boggle at no Crimes, which may advance the Ends they aim at; *Every Thing*, in his Opinion, *being Honest, that is Successful*.²⁶

The reader is enticed by the promise of the author's privileged view of these maxims in practice.

The letters depict Richelieu supremely in control of his political fate, apparently possessing intelligence of every development at home or abroad. He confides to the author that he learnt from the methods of the Chinese

the Way of discovering the most difficult Matters, without its appearing he does any thing for this Purpose. And this is the Method of governing he observes in this Kingdom, wherein are so many restless Spirits.

He displays a gift for conspiring against his rivals behind a mask of impartiality. On Richelieu's death, the author concludes that he endured largely because of his skill 'in reconciling the Misunderstandings between the *King* and the *Queen-Mother*. Whereby, he gained much upon both their Affections'. The greatest tribute to his genius for self-preservation is that he is visited on his deathbed by the grieving King, who remains as dependent upon the minister as ever:

For neither by Publick Arms, nor private Machinations, could they ever prevail against the fixed Destiny of this Great *Minister*; who, though he had been often attempted to be Prison'd, Pistol'd and Stabb'd, yet died quietly in his Bed, having a little before received a Visit from the King.²⁷

Richelieu is the supreme example of how to entrench oneself in power.

²⁶ *The Eight Volumes of Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy* (London: H. Rhodes, 1694), III, 359.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, I, 133; II, 121, 121.

On succeeding Richelieu, Mazarin immediately 'discovers a refined Policy, and a Modesty which hath but few Examples', a talent for stealthily gaining the friendship of all parties at court. He deliberately appears to pool his interest with that of two other ministers, as a means of concealing his own dominant influence:

This is a pure Trick of *Mazarini*; and he serves himself of them as we use a Ladder, designing by their Means to mount by safer Steps, and on their Shoulders, to lift himself unenvied to the Helm of the *State*.

All the time he feigns a desire to return to Italy: 'Thus he grasps with one Hand, what with the other he seems to reject'. It is Mazarin's carefully fashioned 'Moderation', under which he relentlessly advances his interest, to which the author keeps returning. It results in the irony 'that none are more sure of his Favour, than those who have done him Injuries'.²⁸ He understands instinctively that opponents are more reliably overcome through an affected friendship than through active resistance.

During the same period, Cromwell's career was receiving a similar treatment to those of the French ministers. His negotiations with Mazarin seemed to suggest that there was an affinity between the two statesman. *Flagellum; or, The Life and Death, Birth and Burial of O. Cromwell, the Late Usurper*, which is usually attributed to James Heath, is one example. It is intended as a defamatory account, but it still promises in its title 'an Exact Account of his Policies and Successes'. It pays ironic tribute to Cromwell's manoeuvres, caricaturing their elaboration and impenetrability. It begins by rejecting suggestions that Cromwell's birth was accompanied by any of the usual omens:

None of all these Signs revealed or discovered the abstruse, and most reserved deep and mysterious Fortune of this person, The Subtleties, Arts, and Policies of his destiny, potently and irresistibly conspiring with his as close Treasons and dissembled Treacheries, to the ruin and overthrow of this Church and State, singly and insensibly accomplished by the mean and unobserved Hand of this bold and perjurious politique.

²⁸ Ibid., II, 161, 161, 161; III, 227.

For all the author's hostility, the same skill in pursuing one's designs without drawing attention to them, which has been associated with the French ministers, is being attributed to Cromwell. He is seen as equipping himself for his future rise to power even as a schoolboy, excelling at the study of language and religion,

as afterwards appeared by his never speaking what he thought, nor believing what he heard, or was instructed in; So that his main policy was a radical and original Hypocrisie, which growing up with him, could not but be at last so many years of Experience most exquisitely perfected.

Cromwell's cunning is ironically appraised in aesthetic terms. He appears at his most sly when he engineers the King's downfall, while still remaining on good terms with him. He spurs the King and Presbyterians into ever more uncompromising opposition, making the breach between them irreconcilable.

This *Ambodexter* so invisibly managed both the injustice of the *Juncto*, and the indignation and resentment of the King, that he was looked upon no otherwise then but at most as a *kind Spectator* and *Well-wisher* to the Kings Fortunes.²⁹

Like the best French politicians, Cromwell is adept at appearing uninvolved in his own meticulously devised schemes.

Another biography was issued under the alluring title *The Perfect Politician*. The main text is implicitly critical, but a brief 'Character' of Cromwell is appended to it, enabling the author to offer just the sort of clinical evaluation of political contrivances for which there was a popular demand. Opportunism is identified as the key to Cromwell's success:

We find him in the beginning of *England's* Distractions, a most active Instrument to carry on the *Cause* for King and *Parliament*; this pretence holding water, and proving prosperous, he then became the main stickler for Liberty of Conscience without any Limitation. This Toleration became his master-piece in Politicks, for it procured him a party that stuck close in all Cases of necessity.

²⁹ [James Heath], *Flagellum* (London: Sam Crouch, 1679), Title-page, pp. 10, 12, 54. This edition appears in Heidenreich, p. 74, no. 1178. The BL catalogue also includes editions from 1663, 1665, 1669 and 1672.

The author clearly understands the kind of management and relevant catchwords that he is expected to highlight under such an approach. Cromwell's ability to make unimpeded progress during such a turbulent period is similarly analysed:

In his rise, he never cut down one step before another was built to support him: this was seen in his levelling the *Long Parliament*, and present spring of the next *Little One*: then, they being dissolved, in comes an *Instrument* for his own *Government*. In all these Changes, he took time by the foretop, not suffering such an *interregnum* as might encourage the Peoples minds to work him any mischief.³⁰

Cromwell recognized the importance of constantly taking precautions against any twist of fortune, and of keeping as many people as possible dependent upon him. Towards the end, the appendix reverts to the position taken in the main biography, welcoming Providence's intervention in bringing Cromwell's death; but instances of his political sophistication have still been offered for the reader's admiration. Whatever the spirit in which they were written, political biographies exploited the trend for assessing intrigue in the manner of a political aficionado.

Further evidence that a popular audience for any literature concerned with political intrigue existed during Defoe's lifetime can be found in political manuals. Although these were usually dedicated to notable ministers or diplomats, they were often addressed as much to the general reader. One example is *The Art of Negotiating with Princes*, originally written by François de Callieres. The English translator's Preface is quite explicit about the wider applicability of its tactical hints:

The Directions which are here given, although they are chiefly calculated for Publick Ministers, who are imploy'd in Negotiations between Princes; yet they are of so great an Extent, and contain so many Prudential Maxims, with respect to an Intercourse between Man and Man, that I dare say, every private Man may receive a great Benefit from them in his private Capacity, and in his particular Concerns.

³⁰ *The Perfect Politician* (London: J. Crumpe, 1681), pp. 269, 270. The BL catalogue also includes editions from 1660, 1680 and 1681.

The manual itself is by no means the most commercialized example from this period: it firmly rejects 'the vulgar Opinion, that an able Minister ought to be a great Master in the Art of Tricking'.³¹ The book is imbued with the belief that diplomacy is always preferable to war as a means of resolving international disputes. But it still lays great stress on ways of 'managing' your opposite number to your own advantage.

At one point, the manual explains the essential purpose of negotiations, through a Hobbesian generalization about human nature that hints at the universal relevance of its maxims:

It is the Saying of an ancient Philosopher, That the Friendship which is between Men, is only a Commerce wherein every one seeks his own Interest; the same Thing may be said with much greater Reason of the Engagements and Treaties which are made between Sovereign Princes. There are none of them but what are founded on their mutual Advantages; and when both Sides do not find their Advantage by the Treaties, they do not subsist long, and they fall of themselves. So that the great Secret of Negotiation, is to find out the Means of reconciling those common Advantages, and of making them, if it is possible, to keep even Peace together.

The interests of all parties must be honoured in any decision that is reached; or at least appear to be honoured. The manual elsewhere associates with its ideal minister the ability to convince others that their interests are more important to you than your own, so that they can then be more easily manipulated according to your own designs. The author recommends the letters of Cardinal d'Ossat, which reveal how

he makes Advantage of every thing; he is firm where it is necessary so to be, and he is flexible and complaisant as there is Occasion; and he has the Art to make People desire and ask of him what he has Orders to offer to them, and to obtain more than was hop'd for.

Such is his political sleight of hand that he can appear to be making generous concessions, when he is only offering what he might be expected to offer. His rival appears to be taking

³¹ François de Callieres, *The Art of Negotiating with Princes* (London: Geo. Strahan, 1716), pp. xiii, 33. The work appears in Heidenreich, p. 75, no. 1201.

the initiative, and the minister responding honourably, when this situation has been engineered by the minister in the first place. He goes on to remark that such a minister is able 'to penetrate into the inward Recesses of Men's Hearts, and to learn the Art of managing them, and leading them to the end which he proposes'. The idea is expanded later in the book:

The surest way to take the right Handle, is to act in such a Manner, as that those with whom we treat, may find their Interest in the Propositions that are made to them; and to make them sensible thereof, not only by effectual Reasons, but likewise by an agreeable Carriage, expressing a Readiness to yield to their Sentiments in Things which are not essentially contrary to the Mark to which we have a Design to lead them; which engages them insensibly to a like Condescension on their Parts, in other Matters that are sometimes of much greater Importance.³²

The passage describes the skill of persuading others that you are content to subordinate your interest to theirs, without ever actually making such sacrifices. This impression then encourages them to make real concessions in your favour and submit readily to your designs.

For all their air of authority, such manuals were often responding to the popular appetite for lavish descriptions of hole-and-corner politics as obviously as the memoirs fabricated by Courtilz de Sandras. One example, that claims to have been written by one Conradus Reinking, a chancellor to the Duke of Brandenburg, but is more likely to have been the responsibility of its 'translator', Patrick Ker, appeared under the ostentatious title

The Grand Politician or the Secret Art of State-Policy Discovered. In Evident Demonstrations of Unparalleled Prudence, and Confirmed with Wonderful and Successful Adventures, Stratagems, and Exploits of Wisdom and Subtlety: both in Peace and War, by the most remarkable Witts of former Ages.

The Preface assures the reader that 'you may reap here some Ears of Wisdom, Prudence, and Policy, as may relish the Appetite of your Expectation', and goes on to acknowledge

³² Callieres, pp. 81-2, 50-1, 61, 155.

that 'every one, for the most part, reputeth himself a Politician, and able to manage Affairs of greatest weight and consequence'.

The manual itself elucidates in plain language the familiar techniques of gaining the upper hand over rivals without rousing their suspicions. Maxims appear with titles such as '*How to obtain what you Desire, without danger of losing the Favour of him whom you desire it of*'; or '*The Art of obtaining what you desire without asking, but by giving occasion that it may be profer'd*'. The latter advises:

IF you would obtain, without asking what you desire of another; you must first insinuate your self in his Favour, by some familiar Discourse, relating to your purpose; which concerneth both you and him; and then propose what you intend to obtain, as a thing which (if it were granted) would tend much to his Interest.

If he objects,

you must smooth your Design, and smuther it, with all the Policy you can. But must give some other plausible Reason, why of Necessity it ought to be done; for which, Reasons sake, he may of his own Accord proffer what you desire.³³

This describes the knack of deceiving a rival into taking your interest for his own and thus willingly promoting your designs at the expense of his. But the passage is also typical of these manuals in its step-by-step detail: it even suggests how to salvage the stratagem if its intended target responds unpredictably.

Another noteworthy example is *Arcana Aulica; or Walsingham's Manual*, which had at least five editions between 1652 and 1722. This was not the work of Sir Francis Walsingham, but a translation by the later Edward Walsingham of the second part of the *Traite de la Cour, ou Instruction des Courtisans*, written by Eustache du Refuge, a French diplomat and author during Henry IV's reign.³⁴ Again, chapter headings bluntly

³³ [Patrick Ker], *The Grand Politician* (London: Tho. Howkins, 1691), pp. 30, 8, 8, 8.

³⁴ The BL catalogue contains editions from 1652, 1655, 1658, 1694 and 1722. For the identity of Walsingham and the origin of the work, see *DNB*, vol. 59, 231.

encourage the exploitation of all those who present rival interests. For instance, Chapter XIV:

Four kindes of Noble Courtiers; How to be Handled, and made use of; how Warily we ought to Deal with Inconstant Princes.

Its pervasive theme is how a courtier might promote his private interest without damaging his reputation with the prince for subservience and loyalty. Thus Chapter VIII (*How to Manage the Counsels of a Prince*) suggests ways in which he might impose his own decisions upon the prince, and yet still appear to defer to his opinion.

If the *Prince's* inclination in the thing debated be *doubtful* unto him, let him seem to discuss the matter, and so laying down arguments both for the one, and the other side, let him leave the *Prince* to his own election.

This approach allows the prince to change his mind without being too conspicuously dependent upon the advice of a mere courtier. The prince is manipulated, but so sensitively that he retains his dignity.

For having said what you can, you leave the freedom of determining all to the *Prince's* Prudence whereby you will also avoid the danger that many times *Counsellors* are obnoxious unto, if their Advices succeed ill. And if the *Prince* following his first resolutions meet not with success, he will, by so much the more acknowledge and esteem the prudence of that *Courtier*, who foresaw the approaching *misfortune*, when it was yet avoidable.

Even if the prince does not follow the courtier's counsels, the courtier emerges with his position in the court even more firmly established. The prince is never aware that he is the object of such a triumph of manipulation. As Chapter IX stresses: 'They must take heed the *Prince* smell not out, that *himself* is the argument of the *Jest*'.³⁵

The manual generally emphasizes the importance of the courtier concealing his designs, so that his unassuming appearance is preserved. 'It is much more safe ... to *hide our designs*, and as *Rowers* do, turn our *backs* upon the place we are going to'. Chapter XVIII suggests that rival courtiers are better wooed than confronted:

³⁵ *Arcana Aulica* (London: Matthew Gillyflower, 1694), pp. 49, 24, 24, 30.

To which end, we must *court them* with *friendship* and *familiarity*; and though their *envy to us* be very palpable, yet must we express on our parts great *Inclinations* and *Affections* towards them; professing, That we wish nothing more, than that their desires should succeed, and that we desire this very thing that we now pursue, for no other end so much, as that we may become capable to serve our *friends*, and *principally themselves*. In short, we must act our part so, as from the augmentation of our *fortune*, they may conceive hope of advancement to *their own*.³⁶

The most effective way for a courtier to remove any threat posed by the aspirations of others is to engage them in his own designs, disguising these as generous attempts to serve their interests.

Also at the commercial end of the scale is the manual variously known as *The Courtiers Manual Oracle* and *The Art of Prudence*, a translation of a work originally written by the seventeenth-century Spanish moralist Baltazar Gracian. The Preface to a 1685 edition is frank about the wider usefulness of its maxims:

It is the Courtiers Manual Oracle, not of him onely who has the honour to be actually in that station; but of others also, who by knowing, and reflecting upon the transactions of the world, may be capable, if not to serve the Publick, yet to live like men in their generation, and to such it cannot be unseasonable, if they have the ingenuity to act according to its maxims.³⁷

The manual itself consists of three hundred maxims, by turns forthright and self-consciously cryptic, seeming to cover the whole gamut of Machiavellian devices. A number of these place considerable value on the ability to maintain an honourable reputation, however the courtier has actually behaved. For instance, Maxim CXXVI runs:

To commit Folly does not make a Fool; so much as not to know how to hide it ...

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 74, 70.

³⁷ Baltazar Gracian, *The Courtiers Manual Oracle, or The Art of Prudence* (London, 1685), Preface. Subsequently, I quote from a 1702 edition, because this seems most likely to have been the one possessed by Defoe: see Heidenreich, p. 74, no. 1187. The BL catalogue also includes editions from 1694, 1705 and 1714.

All Men fail, but with this difference, that Men of Sense palliate the Faults they Commit, and Fools discover those they are about. Reputation consists more in the manner of Acting, than in what is actually done.

What matters almost more than the success or failure of an attempted manoeuvre is the ability to come through with your reputation intact. Similarly, Maxim CLXXXVII explains how

To Act all that is agreeable by one's Self, and all that's Odious by others.

... Take some Body with thee, upon whom the Blows of Discontent may fall, that is to say, the Hatred, and the Murmurings. The Anger of the Rabble is like that of Dogs; not knowing the Cause of its Evil, it falls upon the Instrument: So that the Instrument bears the Punishment of that whereof it is not the principal Cause.³⁸

The courtier has complete control over his actions and enjoys whatever benefit may arise, but his tools take all the adverse consequences.

Other examples allude to the familiar skill of convincing those whom you are exploiting that you are actually working in their interests. Maxim CLXIV advises how

Under the Veil of another Man's Interest, to find one's Own,

IS a most proper Stratagem for obtaining what One intends ... It is a most important Dissimulation, since the Benefit that is pretended, serves as a Bait to attract the Will. It seems to another that his Interest goes first, when it is only to make way for your Pretension.

And Maxim CCXLIV

To know how to Oblige.

SOME so well Metamorphose Favours, that they seem to give them, even when they receive them. There are those of such admirable parts, that they Oblige by asking, because they transform their own Interest into another Man's Honour. They so adjust matters, that one would Swear, others discharg'd their Duty, while they grant them what they ask, so dexterous are they in inverting the Order of Obligations, by a singular Knack of Policy. At least they make it doubtful, who it is that Obliges. They buy the best Thing with Praises: And when they insinuate a Desire to have it, it is thought an Honour to bestow it; for they engage Civility by making that a Debt, which ought to be the Cause of their Thankfulness. Thus they

³⁸ Gracian, *The Art of Prudence; or A Companion for a Man of Sense* (London: Daniel Brown, 1702), pp. 128, 186-7.

change the Obligation from Passive to Active, being it seems better Politicians, than Grammarians.³⁹

The most accomplished politician can exploit a rival efficiently and still make it appear as if his victim owes him a favour. An appreciation of these techniques should equally make the courtier wary of falling victim to them himself. Maxim CXCIH counsels:

Watch strictly over him that Engages in your Interests, for no other end, than to come off with his Own.

... Some do their own Business, by seeming to do another Man's: So that if one have not the Key of Instruction, one is forced at every turn to burn one's own Finger, to save another Man's goods from the Fire.

Similarly, Maxim CCXV:

To have an Eye over him that Looks one way, and Rows another.

'TIS the common Stratagem of a Politician to amuse the Will, that he may attack it; for so soon as ever it is convinced, it is vanquish'd. He Dissembles his Intention, that he may the better attain it; he puts himself in the second Rank, that he may be the first in Execution. He makes sure of his Blow through the inadvertency of his Adversary.

The terseness of this manual's counsels and its rapturous advocacy of underhand manipulation no doubt contributed to its enduring popularity. Many of these artifices are not only recommended for their efficacy, but also savoured for the neatness and polish with which they may be executed. One maxim refers to

*The Secret Charm, or the Inexpressible Somewhat; which the French call the Je-ne-sai-quoi; and the Spaniards El Despejo ... It is a politick Engine, whereby Affairs are soon dispatched; and, in fine, the Art of coming off handsomely, where one is hampered.*⁴⁰

It is not just the courtier's own immediate interest that must be satisfied by a manoeuvre, but the political aesthetic of later commentators.

I have quoted at length from these various political works to give some impression of the amount of attention that the tactical manoeuvre was receiving in print during the period between the 1670s and 1710s. Moreover, a standard vocabulary with which to

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 147, 236.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 190-1, 208-9, 128-9.

appreciate and extol the choicest examples had emerged. Returning to Defoe's analysis of French superiority in the early issues of the *Review*, it becomes apparent that he was greatly indebted to this literary fashion. He may not necessarily have read all the works which I have discussed (although, as I have indicated, several of them do appear in the catalogue that includes Defoe's library), but he focuses on the same political techniques and summons many of the same key phrases in their appraisal.

At various points in the *Review* during 1704 Defoe gives examples of the exceptional aptitude for politics possessed by the French. He cites the assured skill with which French statesmen have handled potentially rebellious nobles:

The extraordinary Conduct of the *French* as to managing the Courts of Princes, bringing them over to their Interest, and bringing them off from their own, deserves no small Remark in these Papers ... how many times have we found the *French* prevail upon Princes to forsake their Friends, the Interest of their Governments, and their own apparent Advantages, to espouse his Interest? This must be by a Fineness of Management peculiar to the *French*, and no Nation in the World can shew such Instanas [sic] they.

Defoe attributes to French politicians a talent for leading a rival to believe that they are advising or acting with his interests at heart, when in reality they are only making him complicit in their own designs: exactly the kind of manoeuvre which appears in popular Machiavellian literature. He keenly appreciates the way the victim appears to do all the spadework in pursuit of the manipulator's ends, while only undermining his own interests. Defoe later emphasizes that this type of political conduct is 'the very Center and Heart of my Design ... the Reason and Original of writing this Paper':

to disclose to the World the secret Machines, the Policy, the Arts by which *France* has brought its Neighbours, nay, even its Enemies, to subserve, promote, and in effect establish the Greatness and Power which it now enjoys, nay, to the very Ruine and Destruction of themselves.⁴¹

⁴¹ *Review*, I, 14, 186a, 186a.

His subject is not just the rise of France, but her peculiar gift for harnessing rivals and enemies to her cause, to the disadvantage of their own.

Another instance is the way France elicits Sweden's consent in imposing a Frenchman upon the Polish throne, 'a thing so contrary to his Interest as King of *Swedeland*, and contrary to his Religious Interest as a Protestant'. There are a number of alternative candidates more advantageous to Sweden,

but such is, and such always has been, the Power of French Money, the Artifice of their Conduct, or the Terrour of their Arms, that they can bring the greatest Kings in *Europe* to promote their Interest, and Grandeur, at the Expence of their own; and to Weaken, Expose, and sometimes Sell their Interest and People to raise the Power of their Encroaching Neighbour.

Time and again, Defoe depicts France effortlessly resolving such ticklish dilemmas to her own gain. Keen to forge an alliance with the old enemy, Spain, she faces the problem of how to supply French troops to a country that still nurses a grudge against France. So she decides to send an army whose duty is to France, but which in fact consists of men from places as diverse as Italy, Ireland and Scotland, and so cannot be described strictly as 'French'.

By this *French* Fineness of Management, the *Spaniards* have a *French* Army, they have the Substance and not the Name.⁴²

It is the kind of casuistical triumph, exploiting the discrepancy between appearance and reality, which a popular political manual might have offered for emulation.

This thesis contends that Defoe never quite lost this fascination with the 'masterpiece of policy' and the manner in which it might be presented for the reader's entertainment. It lingered beyond the period when he was most politically active, into the final phase of his writing career. Indeed, he provides his most comprehensive explanation of what constitutes a political 'masterpiece' in one of his later works: the much neglected *Political History of the Devil*, published in 1726. A bewildering number of 'masterpieces'

⁴² *Review*, I, 35a, 35a, 20.

are attributed to Satan throughout the work and the phrase comes simply to denote another triumph over his enemies, God and Man. But there are some more revealing passages in which Defoe attempts to identify the distinguishing traits of 'Policy'.

'Tis in Policy, that he may act undiscover'd, that he may see and not be seen, may play his Game in the dark, and not be detected in his Roguery; that he may prompt Mischief, raise Tempests, blow up Coals, kindle Strife, embroil Nations, use Instruments, and not be known to have his Hand in any thing, when at the same time he really has a hand in every thing.

Satan excels at the same technique of disguising his relentless scheming as something much more innocent, that pervades Machiavellian literature. It is the combination of universal influence and absolute irresponsibility that Defoe prizes. After suggesting that the French court in the seventeenth century was 'made the Scene of Satan's Politicks', he argues that although Satan's measures vary, they exhibit a common 'Tendency':

namely, that he may get all his Business carried on by the Instrumentality of Fools; that he may make Mankind Agents in their own Destruction, and that he may have all his Work done in such a Manner as that he may seem to have no Hand in it; nay he contrives so well, that the very Name *Devil* is put upon his opposite Party, and the Scandal of the black Agent lies all upon them.

Similarly, with the Spanish Inquisition in mind, Defoe later observes:

He makes them do his Work, when they think they are doing their own; nay, so cunning is he in his guiding the weak Part of the World, that even when they think they are serving God, they are doing nothing less or more than serving the *Devil*; nay, 'tis some of the nicest Part of his Operation, to make them believe they are serving God, when they do his Work.⁴³

Defoe's understanding of the 'masterpiece' corresponds with the examples that appeared in biographies of Richelieu or Mazarin, and the more popular political manuals. Satan seems to offer the supreme example of someone carrying on his designs through his enemies, in such a way that they appear entirely responsible for their own defeat, distracting attention

⁴³ *The Political History of the Devil* (London: T. Warner, 1726), pp. 221, 224, 225-6, 237-8. For a brief discussion of the work, see Furbank and Owens, *The Canonisation of Daniel Defoe*, pp. 149-50.

from his supervision of events. They comply with his schemes all the more willingly because he leads them to mistake these for measures that will satisfy their own ambitions. Defoe characteristically commends this amusing irony as 'the nicest Part'.

So, Defoe appears to have gleaned ideas from his reading during the 1680s and 1690s that he was still eagerly exploring towards the end of his life. But his enthusiasm in the early issues of the *Review* for a Machiavellian style of politics, which he identifies firmly with France in contrast to the ineptitude of domestic politics, was jogged specifically by his new association with a rising contemporary English minister. In the *Review*, the reader is generally left to infer that England might benefit from some of the features which have facilitated France's transformation into the most united, efficient, powerful nation in Europe. If any such proposal is made, it is in the most general, tentative terms. One issue, having remarked on the greater ease with which subordination is achieved under an arbitrary government, concludes,

only noting before hand that this Subserviency and Fidelity of Officers, is not a Dependent upon Despotic Government, meerly as such, but might easily by proper Methods be obtained in other Countrys, and particularly in our own.⁴⁴

But in his early correspondence with Harley, Defoe was being much less guarded about linking the artifices of Richelieu and his successors with the current political situation. This discrepancy would in fact characterize his whole period of service under Harley.

⁴⁴ *Review*, I, 51.

CHAPTER TWO

Defoe and Harley (I):
How shall you Make your Self Prime Minister of State?

The Popularity I Mean Now, is -- A Politicall Conduct of your Self, between the *Scylla* and the *Charibdis* of Parties; So as to Obtain from Them all a generall Esteem.

Memorandum to Harley, July-August 1704.¹

... ye Sons of Policy and Fraud,
 Whose vast Intrigues your selves alone applaud;
 Who always plot too deep, and soar too high,
 And Damn the Nation's Peace you know not why.
*The Dyet of Poland.*²

To many who lived through Queen Anne's reign, it seemed that the civil war was being revisited upon the country under a different guise. The repeal of the Licensing Act and introduction of the Triennial Act in the 1690s had conspired to render parliamentary politics suddenly more aggressively opinionated and ruthlessly competitive.³ By the start of the new century, the body politic appeared to be fragmenting into myriad factions, all wrangling over ministerial influence, inducing a comic exasperation in the political commentator attempting to keep abreast of these differences. For example, *The Conduct of Parties in England*, a tract that has been attributed to Defoe, enumerates

the unhappy Names of Distinction, by which our State Differences are kept up, and which serve the Contending Parties to spit Fire and Brimstone at one another with; such as Whig, Tory, Old Ministry, New Ministry, Hot Whigs, High-Fliers, *October Club*, Moderate Men, Old Whigs, Modern Whigs, and such like.⁴

¹ *Letters*, p. 42.

² *The Dyet of Poland* ('Dantzick', 1705), p. 6.

³ See Downie, p. 1.

⁴ *The Conduct of Parties in England* (London, 1712), p. 6.

It became a journalistic commonplace to imply that political life had already begun to epitomize the state of 'meer Nature' to which, Hobbes had argued, Man would revert if there were no form of sovereign authority. Hobbes had claimed:

It is manifest, that during the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man, against every man.

He had famously described human life in such circumstances as characterized by 'continuall feare, and danger of violent death ... solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short'.⁵

By 1700, political factions seemed to be motivated by just such a desperate survival instinct, readily embracing natural opponents when an opportunity for power offered.

Hobbes's remedy was a stable, absolute authority to which the people would submit in the confidence that civil war would not return. The goal of national peace justifies exorbitant executive control.

So that it appeareth plainly, to my understanding, both from Reason, and Scripture, that the Soveraign Power ... is as great, as possibly men can be imagined to make it. And though of so unlimited a Power, men may fancy many evill consequences, yet the consequences of the want of it, which is perpetuall warre of every man against his neighbour, are much worse.

Factions are given short shrift, as an unwarranted challenge to the sovereign power to which everyone is understood to have entrusted their private interests. Although Hobbes refrains from prescribing a specific form of authority, he attributes more advantages to rule by an individual than by an assembly. His warning against making the sovereign dependent upon a large number of counsellors typifies his general reservations about assemblies:

He that is carried up and down to his businesse in a framed Counsell, which cannot move but by the plurality of consenting opinions, the execution whereof is commonly (out of envy, or interest) retarded by the part dissenting, does it worst

⁵ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, edited by C.B. Macpherson (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985), pp. 185, 186.

of all, and like one that is carried to the ball, though by good Players, yet in a Wheel-barrough, or other frame, heavy of it self, and retarded also by the inconcurrent judgements, and endeavours of them that drive it.⁶

He assumes that there should be as few encumbrances upon absolute power as possible.

But increasingly in the years following the publication of *Leviathan*, Hobbes's argument was found wanting. Hobbes does not actually state that England has ever descended into the 'state of nature', even during the civil war. The controversial Chapter XIII, '*Of the NATURALL CONDITION of Mankind, as concerning their Felicity, and Misery*', has a reassuring coda which stresses 'the Passions that encline men to Peace'.⁷

The 'state of nature' serves as a monitory vision of the consequences of renewed disorder. But Hobbes was widely misconstrued as suggesting that these conditions already obtained. Consequently, his deterrent against civil war, the 'Common-wealth', in which the whole population agrees to transfer their liberty to the sovereign for their own protection, seemed inadequate to many readers. The memorable image of Man acting from a visceral instinct for self-preservation, suggested by Hobbes's description of the 'state of nature', made it seem unlikely that people would rationally exchange their short-term interests for the lasting security guaranteed by an absolute government. Hobbes himself at times draws attention to the human tendency (even beyond the 'state of nature') to regard immediate advantages before investments for the future:

For all men are by nature provided of notable multiplying glasses, (that is their Passions and Self-love,) through which, every little payment appeareth a great grievance; but are destitute of those prospective glasses, (namely Morall and Civill Science,) to see a farre off the miseries that hang over them, and cannot without such payments be avoyded.⁸

⁶ Ibid., pp. 260, 310.

⁷ Ibid., p. 188. For the misunderstanding of the 'state of nature', and debate about the feasibility of Hobbes's 'Common-wealth', given his view of human nature, see Macpherson's Introduction, pp. 60-3.

⁸ Ibid., p. 239.

Such reflections seem to place a strain on his central proposal.

Defoe inherits Hobbes's preference for an individual over a potentially discordant assembly as sovereign, and embraces his view of human nature at its most disabused.⁹ However, he also seems unconvinced by Hobbes's confidence that Man will weigh up the alternatives of short-term and long-term interest, and invariably opt for the latter. In short, the sovereign cannot rely upon the people submitting to the state voluntarily.

Like other journalists of the period, Defoe bears witness to the impasse which domestic politics has reached. In an early letter to Harley, he voices frustration at how contending parties seem to take ministerial office in rotation, reducing the ideally smooth function of the executive to a disruptive stop-go pattern. He warns against easy solutions:

Tis Plain Those Gentlemen who Propose This Union by Establishing One Party and Suppressing Another, Are In the Dark as to This Matter, and Offer That which has been often Essay'd, and has as often Miscarryed.

The Papist, The Church of England, and The Dissenter, have all had Their Turns in the Publick Administration; and when Ever Any One of Them Endeavourd their Own Settlemt by The Ruine of The Partys Dissenting, the Consequence was Supplanting themselves.

Defoe, like others, depicts party politics as a 'Hobbesian' arena, in which the current ministry is always besieged by rival interests motivated only by self-preservation. But his private remedy is less predictable. In his long memorandum to Harley of July-August 1704, he addresses the question of 'How shall you Make your Self Prime Minister of State, Unenvy'd and Unmolested, be Neither Address'd Against by Parliament, Intreagu'd Against by Partyes, or Murmur'd at by the Mob -- ?';¹⁰ but turns not to Hobbes for answers, but to popular Machiavellian literature, with its understanding that political

⁹ Defoe's debt to Hobbes has been acknowledged increasingly over the last fifteen years. See Virginia Birdsall, *Defoe's Perpetual Seekers* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1985), pp. 14-23; Kay, pp. 45-73.

¹⁰ *Letters*, pp. 50, 31.

divisions might be more reliably exploited than reversed, and that a contrived consensus might succeed where open confrontation has failed.

There are grounds for believing that Defoe had singled out Harley as a particularly congenial politician, even before his imprisonment for *The Shortest-Way with the Dissenters* necessitated an approach to the Speaker. His early letters to the minister suggest that he has at least been observing the politician's career with interest for a while, even though they had been in opposing camps towards the end of King William's reign.¹¹ Defoe rather apologetically recounts the popular view of his patron early on in their correspondence:

That you are a Man wholly Resolv'd to Make your fortunes and to bring it to Pass will Sacrifice your Judgement as well as your Friends to your Intrest.

That you gave Proofs of this in Embraceing the Party of Those People who Pleas'd themselves, and Strove to be Popular at the Expence of king William.

And that he deceived both William and the Dissenters. A few months later, a similar judgement appears:

Both Sides are against him, he has Trim'd So Long On both Sides, and Cares't both Partys, Till both begin to See themselves ill Treated, and Now, as he Loves Neither Side, Neither Side will Stand by him. All the Whigs of King William's Reign Expected to ha' Come In Play Again, and had Fair words Given Them, but They See it was but wording them into a Fools Paradise, and Now The Two Ends will be Reconcil'd to Overturn his Middle Way.¹²

These views are to some extent endorsed by Defoe, who sought to persuade Harley to align himself with the Whigs and Dissenters. But the passages are most interesting in suggesting how Harley had evoked opportunism and duplicity for Defoe even before 1703, albeit without much success and to an end of which he disapproved. Read out of

¹¹ Defoe may have written the *Legion's Memorial* addressed to Harley as Speaker in 1701. The legend that he delivered it to Harley in person at Parliament is now generally discredited: see Backscheider, pp. 79-82. His first approach to Harley is more likely to have been when he was in the Fleet prison for debt in 1702: see Downie, p. 60.

¹² *Letters*, pp. 39-40, 67.

context, this might seem like criticism of Harley's lack of principle; but surrounded by Defoe's proposed schemes, it is closer to regret at hitherto misdirected talent. Defoe seems to have approached his employment under Harley with a preconceived notion of the minister as, potentially, a latter-day English successor to Richelieu and Mazarin.

The themes and vocabulary of Machiavellian literature inform Defoe's letters to Harley of 1704 as much as the *Review* during these months, but are now applied to current English rather than past French politics. The extraordinary memorandum to Harley of July-August employs Machiavellian ideas to disprove the apparent incompatibility of the post of prime minister with the English party-oriented system. English politics might seem a peculiarly barren soil for the kind of contrivances exalted in the popular lives of French statesmen.

I allow That in Our Constitution we Admit of No Supreme Ministry, That the Nation is Perticularly Jealous of Favourites. These Are the Two Chief Obstructions in the Way of a Refin'd and Riseing States Man.

But the failure of would-be prime ministers in England in the past has only been one of tactics, Defoe suggests. Court favourites have failed by pursuing their self-interest too ostentatiously, leaving the propertied classes in no doubt that their taxes were servicing private estates. Those who used less crude methods proved more durable: such as Sir Francis Walsingham, Secretary of State under Queen Elizabeth, 'The Most Employ'd in Difficult Cases and the Greatest Master of Intelligence of the Age'. Defoe follows political manuals in valuing guile and ingenuity in politics. He celebrates Julius Caesar as politician rather than soldier, suggesting that his greatness was founded on his specious reputation for generosity: He 'Conquer'd More Enemyes in the Forum Than in the Field'.¹³ There might have been more English prime ministers if there had been more subtle English politicians.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 29, 30, 33.

But there is a more interesting implication to his argument. He advances Richelieu as the supreme model for Harley's political conduct, but observes that in a parliamentary system Harley does not have the option of brute force that was available to the French minister.

Cardinall Richlieu Supply'd the Want of the Peoples favour by Meer force, and So Ruin'd those that Oppos'd him ... Tho this would be Impracticable here, it showes the Absolute Necessity of the Thing, *or of an Equivalent*.¹⁴

It is almost as if the English minister has the opportunity, perforce, to surpass even Richelieu's politics. He must find a tactical 'Equivalent' to the might which a French minister has as a last resort in counteracting opposition. In other words, the party system might actually be an advantage, an inviting challenge, to an aspiring English statesman.

The political substitute for force that Defoe has in mind is the assiduous courting of all factions, facilitated by an extensive intelligence network. Defoe argues at length for the expedience of generosity towards all sides, described at one point as 'a Secret in Mannagement' that silences discontent. He pays sporadic lip-service to the public good, but is essentially introducing a much more manipulative subtext to the bland Country principle of non-party government.

Sett your friends by, *if They Are Such They'l Wait*, but Surprize your Enemyes if you have any with Voluntary kindness.

The Influence your Office, as well as Personall Merit Gives you on the Queen, will give you Opportunityes Either to bring off Many of the Hott Men on the Other Side, or So to Discourage Them that They may Cease to Disturb--and as to the Moderatest of Them you will often by Serving them Oblige Them to Acknowledge you.¹⁵

The intelligence services would feed Harley's inner cabinet with information about rivals and opponents crucial to his pursuit of universal popularity. With access to such insider

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 34.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 33, 32, 43.

knowledge, factions can be wooed in suitable terms and strings pulled with ease during elections.

The concrete example proposed by Defoe, here and in a subsequent letter, is the management of the Dissenters. He is confident that Harley can win their favour without alienating the Church. It is typically decked out as a dazzling political stunt, through which two mutually exclusive interests are apparently satisfied.

The Dissenters Jealousies May Effectually be Remov'd, The wholl Party Entirely Engag'd, and Brott to an Absolute Dependence Upon her Majtie, and a Conjunction with her Intrest, and yet No Concessions Made to Them which May give Reason of Distast to the Church.

Defoe explains that he is not suggesting the repeal of the Test Act nor condoning Occasional Conformity, but hinting that the goodwill of both Dissenters and Church might be better maintained by keeping the two parties separate. This had perhaps been the rationale behind his distinctive position on the Occasional Conformity Bill during 1702-3, as he controversially opposed both the Bill and the practice. Defoe is against any measures that would 'Make the Government Seem Byast in Their Favour', as this would risk incurring the full hostility of the High Churchmen.¹⁶ But, tactfully, Harley might convince the Dissenters that he is acting on their behalf, while not provoking resentment among the Churchmen on whom he must also depend for support.

Naturally, Defoe allots to himself a central role in this scheme. He is the agent through whom Harley can capitalize on the defeat of the Occasional Conformity Bill in the Lords.

To Effect This a short Paper shall be handed about, Among the Dissenters Onely, giveing Them a Pretended View of the Measures taken by Some Persons, *Nameing None*, to Convince the Queen of the Unreasonableness of this bill.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 52, 53.

It Can Not fail to Open their Eyes that you are their Friend and yet if your Affaires Should Require you to Dissown Such a Paper it shall Easily be True that you had No knowledge of it, for you May Really kno' Nothing of it--¹⁷

Defoe has sometimes been considered a principled spokesman for the Dissenters, but here the cunning behind his advocacy could not be plainer. He will produce a piece of propaganda insinuating that Harley had advised the Queen to drop her support for the bill, but written in such a way that Harley cannot be held to account for these claims. Defoe will both convince the Dissenters of their dependence on Harley and shield the minister from their subsequent expectations. His duty to Harley takes precedence over his loyalty to the Dissenters. They are only one of several lobbies that the minister must placate, though one which Defoe, as a Dissenter himself, is in an advantageous position to influence.

In Defoe's early letters to Harley, even the manner in which he formulates his suggestions reflects his attachment to a popular Machiavellism. The notion of pursuing one's interest so indiscernibly as to leave others innocent of any challenge to their designs pervades his counsels to Harley. He conceives of Harley's inner cabinet and intelligence service in exactly these terms.

I had a Designe to propose your Settling a Private Office for the Conducting Matters of This Nature, So Directed as Neither in Generall to be Suspected of what it should act, and yet be as Publickly known as any Other; That in This office Openly and without the help of Mr *St Johns Back Staires* a Correspondence may be Effectually Settled with Every Part of England, and all the World beside, and yet the Very Clarks Employ'd Not kno' what Thay are a doeing.

Defoe accentuates the mismatch between appearance and underlying reality at the heart of his scheme. The new office will be public knowledge and ostensibly compatible with the constitution, but will be uniquely inscrutable, even to the functionaries who maintain it. The difficulty of imagining how this might transpire perhaps indicates how Defoe's Machiavellian flights of fancy can sometimes get the better of his reason. The elevation of

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 40.

closed government into an attractive 'master-stroke of state' is his overriding concern here. The paradox essential to the manoeuvre, signalled by 'and yet', a conjunction that is scattered through Defoe's work, reappears in other descriptions of the office.¹⁸ In his next letter, he remarks that it will 'Execute Necessary Parts of Private affaires without the Intervention of the Privy Council and yet have Their Concurrence as farr as the Law Requires'.¹⁹ An inner cabinet will quietly subvert the constitutional status quo while seeming to abide by it.

Defoe similarly describes the intelligence network which will enable Harley to preside invisibly over the comprehensive regulation of national political life.

All the Leading Men of all Sides, would be Influenc'd here by a Rare and Secret Management. They Should Never Stir or Speak as a Party but it Should be known ...

This would be The wheel of All Publick business, and all the Other branches Must of Course Depend on the Mannagement of This Office.

There is an echo here of the language usually applied to Providence in Puritan literature. It is as if Harley's relation to his political rivals will be the same as that of Providence to Man. The office itself will be in a similar position with regard to the rest of the ministry, fundamentally masterminding the administration of the country, but allowing the other departments the appearance of continuing autonomy. Defoe uses similar imagery to define his own position as counsellor to Harley rather than to the whole ministry.

¹⁸ For Defoe's attachment to conjunctions like 'and yet' and 'but still', see G.A. Starr, *Defoe and Casuistry* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 51-3. I see Defoe's frequent use of such phrases arising not so much from an interest in the resolution of problematic cases of conscience, as from a fascination with the general idea of pursuing a particular course of action while giving a quite contrary impression, which Defoe would have encountered in political rather than casuistical literature.

¹⁹ *Letters*, pp. 28, 34.

Give me Leav Sir as at first to Say I Can Not but Think Tho' her Majtie is Good,
and My Ld Treasurer kind, yet my Wheel within all These Wheels must be your
Self, and There I Fix my Thankfullness as I have of a Long Time my hope.²⁰

He is intimating that a private devotion to Harley's interest will underlie and if necessary undermine his public loyalty to the other 'Wheels' of government.

The wheel-within-wheels metaphor is discussed in a pamphlet that is usually attributed to either Defoe or John Tutchin: *A Dialogue between a Dissenter and the Observer, Concerning 'The Shortest Way with the Dissenters'*. The Observer remarks on the fury of the Dissenters against the controversial pamphlet:

*That's a mystery no man can unriddle but your selves. 'Tis like Mr. Mead's Wheel within a Wheel, and a further Testimony to the World that you are a most unaccountable People whose ways are past finding out.*²¹

The author is alluding to Matthew Mead's sermon on *The Vision of the Wheels Seen by the Prophet Ezekiel*, in which he explains the meaning of the image:

It is to show us how cross and contrary the motions of Providence are to our apprehensions and designs. He brings about his purposes by contrary means. We set the Wheel a going to bring about such a design, and the Wheel in the midst of the Wheel that brings about another.

Mead cites the example of Haman plotting against the Jews, but, at the moment he expects his schemes to come to fruition, finding that the Jews have triumphed over him.²² This understanding of Providence tallies with the Machiavellian technique of bringing rivals into conformity with one's designs without rousing their suspicions. For Defoe, it seems, the rising statesman must acquire something of Providence's omniscience and mystique, if he is to achieve lasting success.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 45, 16.

²¹ *A Dialogue between the Dissenter and the Observer* (London, 1703), p. 25.

²² Matthew Mead, *The Vision of the Wheels seen by the Prophet Ezekiel Opened and Applied in Sermons* (London, 1689), p. 35.

Defoe never quite sheds this curiosity about the idea of exercising a universal control over human affairs. In *The Political History of the Devil*, he describes Satan's expanding influence over human affairs in a manner that recalls his earlier ambitions for Harley.

From this time forward you are to allow the *Devil* a mystical Empire in the World; not an Action of Moment done without him, not a Treason but he has a Hand in it, not a Tyrant but he prompts him, not a Government but he has a _____ in it; not a Fool but he tickles him, not a Knave but he guides him; he has a Finger in every Fraud, a Key to every Cabinet.²³

Clearly, because the subject is the Devil, the tone must be one of derision; but the accumulation of detail suggests fascination also. Satan is a kind of rival to Providence, able to secretly determine human conduct to his own advantage and to the detriment of Man. Defoe envisages Harley acquiring a similar authority, that will keep him rooted in power.

In his early letters to Harley, Defoe was in fact predicting quite accurately the course which English politics would gradually follow during the eighteenth century. The bloodless Revolution of 1688 had shown that political change could be implemented without recourse to a civil war that would disturb the social hierarchy. But while it had served to prevent the Crown encroaching upon the legislative authority of Parliament, it did not stop subsequent ministries similarly attempting to engross power. The 1690s saw a Country campaign against the subtle manipulation of Parliament by the executive, which led to the introduction of place bills, and a triennial bill which inevitably intensified party divisions. But for a Modern Whig, such as Defoe, the Revolution represented not so much the triumph of certain timeless political principles, enshrined in the 'ancient constitution', as a modern settlement securing a Protestant Succession and requiring stability to survive: a stability which, ironically, might only be attained through a discreet infusion of absolutism

²³ *The Political History of the Devil*, p. 215.

into the political system.²⁴ Defoe was not alone in feeling that strong government was needed; but his peculiar relish for the way political innovations might be introduced without appearing to subvert the established constitution derives from his fascination with the idea, culled from Machiavellian literature, of exploiting an opponent without his knowledge.

By the 1730s, the Revolution was indeed being consolidated under the government of an entrenched prime minister, adept at playing factions against one another, with an inner cabinet and extensive intelligence service at his disposal. But in 1704 these ideas were still highly contentious. Even in his memorandum, Defoe tends to dilute his candid advice on how 'to fix an Invulnerable Reputation' with the language of public service, as if wary of shocking Harley by focusing too closely on his private interest. He cajoles him with the sort of casuistical reasoning later adopted by his fictional characters:

They Say Those Designs Require Most Policy which have Least of honesty; This Design must be honest because it must be honest To Serve Our Country.²⁵

Defoe had good reason to make his proposals cautiously. Although Harley may have been acquiring the popular reputation of a calculating 'trimmer', his political origins lay in the Country school that had gained prominence in the aftermath of the Revolution.²⁶ However he may have developed as a minister during Queen Anne's reign, Harley continued to associate himself publicly with Country principles by commissioning or even contributing to propaganda from authors of that persuasion. As I have already shown, the kind of popular Machiavellism to which Defoe alludes in his letters to Harley, was anathema to Country theorists.

²⁴ For these conflicting interpretations of the Revolution, see Downie, *Jonathan Swift* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), pp. 8, 38-9, 82, 259.

²⁵ *Letters*, pp. 32, 31.

²⁶ See Downie, pp. 20-3.

Harley had become acquainted with the John Toland by at least 1699, when he sponsored his edition of Harrington's works. By 1701 Toland had in effect become one of Harley's propagandists. Harley was rumoured to have collaborated with him on *The Art of Governing by Partys*, a tract which warns King William against the dangers of becoming too attached to any particular party. It also attacks the methods of the Junto Lords, who until recently had dominated the ministry, and were now attempting to precipitate the dissolution of a parliament eager to investigate their administration. As J.A. Downie has argued, the pamphlet prefigures later Harleian propaganda 'in exposing court methods to divide and rule'.²⁷ It traces the existence of party divisions back to Charles II's attempt to consolidate his position by courting Catholics. Toland is scornful of those who see government as an exercise in statecraft:

But they value themselves above all things on their profound skill in the *Arcana Imperii*, and tho' in the ordinary actions of Life, they possess a very modest share of Reason; yet they pretend to be absolute Masters of what they call *Reason of State*. Our Ministers of late years have made no less noise about this same Reason of State, than the *Italians* did in the beginning of this last age, and for some time before.²⁸

For Toland, 'reason of state' is simply a superstition used by governments to keep themselves unaccountable.

Defoe shares Toland's perception of the instability that inevitably arises when party government becomes the norm, and similarly locates the origin of party divisions in the opportunism of the Stuart Kings, albeit with more fascination than Toland. But he offers a very different remedy for national stability in his early letters to Harley. He begins one by

²⁷ Ibid., p. 43. For a discussion of the conflict between the Lords and Commons, and the old ministry and the new ministry, that raged around Harley's Speakership, see Downie's 'Robert Harley, Charles Davenant, and the Authorship of the Worcester Queries', *Literature and History*, 3 (1976), 83-99.

²⁸ [John Toland], *The Art of Governing by Partys* (London: Bernard Lintot, 1701), p. 93.

recalling (or possibly fabricating) some maxims which he claims to have offered to King William, and then applies them to Harley's circumstances.

'Your Majtie Must Face About, Oblige your Friends to be Content to be Laid by, and Put In your Enemyes, Put them into Those Posts in which They may Seem to be Employ'd, and Thereby Take off the Edge and Divide The Party.' ...

Sir, The Whigs are weak; they may be Mannag'd, and Always have been So. What Ever you do, if Possible Divide Them, and they are Easy Too be Divided. Caress The Fools of Them Most, There are Enough Among Them. Buy Them with here and There a Place; it may be well bestow'd.

This is an extraordinary passage, considering that it recommends exactly the divide-and-rule tactics that have been denounced in a pamphlet which the letter's addressee probably commissioned. Moreover, Defoe portrays himself as chief counsellor to the very court at which Toland levelled his attack. Defoe goes on to offer just the sort of underhand expedient which Toland considers a perversion of true government. An Occasional Conformity Bill might be brought into parliament 'by Trusty hands', in the knowledge that it will drive a wedge between the Whigs, who are dependent on the support of the Dissenters, and the Tories, thus putting paid to any imminent cross-party alliance.²⁹ The notion of using party divisions to the advantage of the government, rather than taking a lofty stand against them, clearly appealed to Defoe; but it ran counter to the line taken in Harley's official propaganda.

During the period when Harley was Speaker, Charles Davenant became responsible for the publication and distribution of his propaganda. Davenant himself made a significant contribution to Harleian propaganda with his four *Modern Whig* pamphlets, the first and most famous of which, *The True Picture of a Modern Whig*, was almost certainly supervised by Harley. J.A. Downie has even suggested that the resourceful wit of

²⁹ *Letters*, pp. 68, 69. For the question of Defoe's intimacy with King William, see Downie, 'Daniel Defoe: King William's Pamphleteer', *Eighteenth Century Life*, 12 (1988), 105-17.

these works, which is not conspicuously in evidence in Davenant's previous tracts, might be explained by Harley's involvement.³⁰

In these pamphlets, 'Tom Double', the representative Modern Whig, extols the kind of misconceived stratagems that Davenant had condemned in his earlier essays. In *Essays upon Peace at Home, and War Abroad*, Davenant offers a description of divide-and-rule tactics, only to expose them as inherently doomed. A weak monarch always breeds factions, and his attempts to play them against each other only exacerbate the situation:

So private men grew upon him, and not being in a condition to suppress both, he was compelled to court first one and then the other side, as his necessities required, himself nourishing that disease, which, in the end, wasted his power; or, if he had false cunning, and meditated in his mind to overthrow the laws, underhand he encouraged parties, kept them equally poised, and suffered them to consume their strength one against the other, in hopes they should be both so impaired by their mutual strivings, as to be unable to give him opposition, and thus to become master of the whole at last.

Davenant does not just despise this form of politics, but, as I have suggested in the previous chapter, objects to the way that disastrous, short-term manoeuvring is perceived as sophisticated.

Double offers similar proposals in a more rousing, demotic speech that perhaps suggests the author's (or even Harley's) secret fascination with such elaborate intrigue. In *The True Picture of a Modern Whig*, he describes how the return of the Whigs to government depends upon their appeal to the self-interest of a mass of uncommitted people:

The bulk of our party consists of those who are of any side where they can best make their markets; such sort of men naturally like the Whigs most, because ours was a negligent weak administration. Every body did what seemed good in his own eyes, we troubled no man with calling him to account ... In short, all men cheated to what degree they pleased, which was winked at in hopes to make and to secure a party. Therefore all the busy proling fellows both in town and country, who hope

³⁰ Downie, pp. 49-50. For Davenant's role as Harley's head of propaganda before Swift, see Downie, pp. 41, 52-5.

to advance themselves, wish to see our noble friends restored to their former power.³¹

This is not dissimilar to Defoe's vision of Harley's ministry sustaining itself by appearing to satisfy the interests of diverse factions. Defoe shares Davenant's view of modern politics as a Hobbesian 'state of nature', where self-interest overrides principle, but accepts these conditions as the reality with which any minister must work, in a way that Davenant cannot. Defoe himself can almost be seen as one of these 'busy proling fellows', prepared to serve any ministry so that he can remain close to the heart of power, providing that it favours the Protestant Succession. He is instinctively a Modern Whig, always happier counselling a government on how it might preserve itself against a refractory parliament, than acting as a vigilant, critical outsider.

Davenant also adorns Double's speech with familiar Machiavellian buzz-words, identifying the character with the misconception of politics as an art which he had attacked in his earlier essays. In the third pamphlet in the series, *The True Picture of a Modern Whig Reviv'd*, Double expands on the skill of the Modern Whigs in maintaining party hostilities only to exploit them, while having the Church universally blamed for the situation.

That's our Master-piece, to lay our Faults at their Door, and charge 'em home upon them; the fine spinning of such *Politicks* as these, exceeds all that ever was done by all before us; and it is so nice a piece of *Folly* and *Madness* together, it wou'd crack an Honest Man's Brain to consider it, or puzzle a Wise Man how to distinguish it: And yet, when it shall be told to our Posterity, what a world of People such Fantastick Amusements as these drew in, to side with a strong Party in P__l____t, against the Interest of both CH____ and N____n, under the Notion of being Friends to both, I am persuaded it will be almost incredible.³²

Davenant ironically adopts several of the stylistic features of Machiavellian literature here: the idea of the 'masterpiece', the aesthetic evaluation of a particular artifice, and the

³¹ Davenant, V, 13-14; IV, 153-4.

³² [Davenant], *The True Picture of a Modern Whig Reviv'd* (London, 1707), p. 26.

general tone of exaggerated wonder. He ridicules the way sheer hypocrisy is palmed off on a popular audience as political genius.

It somehow comes as no surprise by 1710, in the final pamphlet, *Sir Thomas Double in Court*, to find Double giving the following revelation about his expedition to Scotland at the time of the Union:

That I might succeed the better, I constituted *Daniel De Foe*, Esq; my Chief Secretary; of whose Capacity in Affairs of the like nature, I had long Experience, and a most Revered Opinion.

Davenant clearly takes it for granted that Defoe is a Modern Whig in spirit and practice. Earlier in the pamphlet, Double names the *Review*, along with the *Observer*, as 'the proper Pulses of our Party': they replicate the opportunistic manoeuvring of their patrons, defending or decrying the ministry or the Commons as it serves the party's interest. The role which Double assumes in Scotland is uncannily like Defoe's own at that time, except that he sought to promote the Union rather than undermine it. Double explains that he spoke to a number of people there, assessing the degree to which they were likely to support or disable the Union. He observed 'Who had been most subservient to the Designs of our Party here at Home: And lastly, who were most like to be blindly dependent on us in time to come', then bribed them accordingly. Defoe may have omitted the latter, but this is essentially the kind of undercover mission that he undertook. Davenant suggests that a relish for intelligence work is a peculiarly Modern Whig trait.³³

Ironically, Defoe was in reality working for Davenant's colleague Harley, who is honoured in the pamphlet. Firstly, Double sees him as a thorn in the side of Godolphin's

³³ [Davenant], *Sir Thomas Double in Court* (London: John Morphew, 1710), pp. 27, 20, 28. Pocock even goes so far as to claim that Double 'is himself partly a portrait of Defoe': *The Machiavellian Moment*, p. 449n. I think it is more the case that Double is a caricature of a particular outlook on politics, which Davenant associates with Defoe amongst others.

and Marlborough's entrenched government. Then, Double's Old Whig sidekick, Richard Whiglove, portrays him as a genuinely wise, responsible public servant:

The Services he has done his Q___n and Country in this Juncture, and the undaunted Courage and great Abilities he has shewn in it are visible, and will be always acknowledg'd.³⁴

Defoe too can describe Harley in these terms when necessary, but he harbours an alternative view of the statesman, which bestows upon him some of the characteristics of a Tom Double. That Defoe's delusions about both Harley and himself should resemble so closely Davenant's satire on political unscrupulousness indicates just how dangerous was his attachment to Machiavellian politics.

Although Harley soon became a senior minister, ultimately outstripping Marlborough and Godolphin for the title of prime minister, his propaganda never really departed from the Country arguments of 1700-2. As J.A. Downie has shown, the propaganda campaign launched by Harley during his period of exile from government between 1708 and 1710 echoes that at the start of the century in many respects.³⁵ Harley himself, in a draft version of a tract that never reached publication, sees the duumvirate of Marlborough and Godolphin as just the latest example of a self-serving oligarchy surviving by divide-and-rule tactics. It is a time-honoured practice, dating from the attempts of Cromwell and his cronies to consolidate their power by each wooing different factions. He generalizes about the technique, when discussing the conduct of James II's court:

For they act by this Principle, to divide the Nation into Partys, then to joyne with that wch is the most unreasonable, that they in returne may be more devoted to them, & more ready to assist them *in all* their *avaritious* and ambitious Practices.

³⁴ [Davenant], *Sir Thomas Double at Court*, p. 59.

³⁵ Downie, pp. 43, 54, 119.

Thus they joynd with the Papists, & at the same time had Runners amongst the Dissenters ... At the same time, they had a squadron of *Court Bishops* ...³⁶

This is similar to Defoe's advice to Harley to 'Sett your friends by ... but Surprize your Enemyes if you have any with Voluntary kindness'.³⁷ The idea of undermining the interests of opponents by placating them and temporarily using their support, rather than rising above all factions, is a staple butt of criticism in Harleian propaganda. His tract aims to alert true Whigs and Tories to how their artificial divisions are being manipulated by the ministry, and calls on them to unite.

The same message is at the heart of Simon Clement's *Faults on Both Sides*, a work which J.A. Downie has described as 'the nearest thing we have, in print, to a full-scale exposition of Harleian ideology'.³⁸ Here, the ministry are accused of trying to survive by exploiting factions, although in reality they are only allowing themselves to be made into the tools of the Junto. Harley is set up as a Country alternative to government by such hackneyed devices, capable of leading a coalition drawn from all sides. The terms in which Harley's example is couched are particularly noteworthy:

As St. *Paul* became all unto all that he might gain some, if this Gentleman has employ'd the Dexterity of which he is so great a Master, to draw off the best men of that Party from the extream which they had formerly fallen into, and to win them into the true Interest of the nation, his Voting with them, pleasing them, and gaining their good opinion in order to good Ends, are so far from faults, that they deserve the highest applause.

The Biblical allusion is a favourite of Defoe's, which he applies to Harley in his memorandum. A close comparison between his and Clement's use of the reference is revealing.

³⁶ 'Plain English to All Who are Honst or Would be so if they knew how', ed. by W.A. Speck and J.A. Downie, *Literature and History*, 3 (1976), 102-3. For a discussion of the tract, see Downie, pp. 105-6.

³⁷ *Letters*, p. 32.

³⁸ Downie, p. 119. The tract is discussed on pp. 119-22.

This is the Dissimulation I Recomend, which is Not Unlike what the Apostle Sayes of himself; becoming all Things to all Men, that he might Gain Some. This Hypocrise is a Vertue, and by This Conduct you Shall Make your Self Popular, you shall be Faithfull and Usefull to the Sovereign and belov'd by The People.³⁹

Defoe makes no attempt to play down the duplicity of such conduct, even though it is balanced by a public-spirited end. He seems to relish the compression of contrasting means and ends which the maxim affords. He places Harley's own reputation before his service to Queen and country, as if the latter are only important as far as they contribute to his popularity. Clement, on the other hand, produces a slightly vaguer, more innocuous version of the allusion, omitting any mention of the 'things' that have been assumed, or of the 'men' who have been persuaded. Harley's conduct here is not so much a matter of deception, as arbitration. Clement attributes 'Dexterity' to him, but this describes the reasoning with which he talks certain men out of their obstinacy. The word seems to lack the devious connotations that it often has in Machiavellian literature.⁴⁰ Above all, it is 'the best Men' whom Harley has been courting, and so little pretence seems to have been required from him; whereas Defoe has had the pursuit of popularity even among his opponents in mind. The tract concludes with a call for reconciliation that scorns the idea of managing factions:

... that they may no longer suffer themselves to be made use of as Tools, and to be play'd against one another by crafty and designing Men, who regard them no further than as they can make them subservient to their own purposes.⁴¹

In the safety of his correspondence with Harley, Defoe toys with the notion of Harley as just one of these 'crafty and designing Men'.

³⁹ [Simon Clement], *Faults on Both Sides* (London, 1710), p. 33; *Letters*, p. 43.

⁴⁰ See Rogers, 'Shapes and Postures: Swift, Walpole and the Rope-Dancers', in *Literature and Popular Culture in Eighteenth Century England* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1985), pp. 80, 82n.

⁴¹ [Clement], p. 55. See also *Letters*, p. 159, where Defoe applies the St. Paul allusion to himself as spy: '... and still at the End of all Discourse the Union is the Essentiall and I am all to Every one that I may Gain some'.

The various works of propaganda supervised by Harley illustrate how widely Defoe's political inclinations diverged from the Country position with which Harley consistently sought to be associated. It seems likely that both men were acutely conscious of this gulf. Defoe was a special case among Harley's propagandists. His value lay in his opportunity to further Harley's cause, while remaining in the public mind the associate of thoroughgoing Whigs such as John Tutchin and John Dunton. He was also a figure of considerable notoriety after his imprisonment for *The Shortest-Way*: public knowledge that he was in Harley's employment would only have increased the minister's own popular reputation for deviousness. When their association did filter through to Grub Street, it was quickly capitalized upon. An anonymous squib entitled *The Welsh-Monster*, written after Harley's fall from power in 1708, wrings as many insults as possible from the politician's rumoured association with Defoe. It culminates in the image of them both desperately trying to outsmart each other:

For both still upwards cast an Eye,
And did at the same Quarry fly:
Each, like a true Fanatick Brother,
Contriving how to chouse the other.
And by some undermining Art,
To quit their Hold, and get the Start:
For tho' they join'd like loving Friends,
Yet each had his peculiar Ends;
And, fir'd with equal Hopes of Honour,
Form'd Projects to disturb the Donor.

But on the whole Harley seems to have ensured that Defoe's services were never quite common knowledge. When Swift took charge of propaganda for Harley's ministry after 1711, Defoe was the one government writer with whom he seems to have had no contact.⁴²

⁴² *The Welsh-Monster* (London, 1708?), p. 31. For Swift's ignorance of Defoe's services, see Downie, p. 162.

Defoe himself understood the nature of his role under Harley. As we have seen with his proposals for wooing the Dissenters, he set himself the task of winning support for Harley without appearing to represent the minister in any sense. Most interestingly, he appears to have been conscious of the need publicly to suppress, or at least refract, his Machiavellian fantasies: particularly that of Harley attaining absolute power without apparently subverting the post-1688 settlement. The considerable divergence between his private aspirations for his patron and his pronouncements as 'Mr. *Review*' or 'The Author of *The True-born Englishman*' is nothing less than a deliberate policy.

The ideas which Defoe was airing in his letters to Harley, and indeed any mention of Harley himself, are absent from the *Review* after its first six months. When Defoe raises the subject of domestic politics, he strikes the attitude of a conservative, unpartisan observer, exasperated by the subversive conspiracies of factions vying for power. Publicly, Defoe castigates party politicians for the kind of hypocrisy which, practised by a minister, he has elsewhere considered a virtue.

A Few Honest Men I must allow on all Sides, but besides them, we have such a Medly of Amphibious Monsters, that profess one thing, and act another; that look one way, and row another, that no Man alive knows where to have them.

Such conduct is scarcely different from the kind of manoeuvre celebrated by Defoe's favourite wheels-within-wheels metaphor. Privately, Defoe has assumed that Harley should control factions by outstripping them at their cloak-and-dagger game; here he adopts the indignant opposition which he has dismissed as ineffectual in his letters. As Laura Ann Curtis has amply shown, Defoe's predominant persona, once the *Review* has settled after its initial identity crisis, is that of the plain-dealer, which demands that he should invert his taste for the intricacies of political intrigue.

Men generally take wide and excentrick Steps in prosecuting secret dark Designs, the ways of Honesty are all laid out in straight direct Lines, pointing fairly at their discovered end, viz. Justice and Truth -- There is no need of Intrigue and Cabal-Party, and Combination to carry them, it only wants that all Men should pursue the same just End, and they would immediately concur in the Means ... The Conduct

of the rest depends upon Trick, Sham, and Sharping. 'Tis all Intrigue and Artifice, the Effects of human Policy; the Lines are oblique, and of all sorts of indirect Angles, confused and conceal'd; their ways are full of Darkness, and tend to it in General.⁴³

Even initially in the *Review* itself, when discussing French politics, Defoe has seen the complication and obscurity produced by 'human Policy' as an advantage to a government seeking to screen itself from potential dispossessors. The notion that there should be no divergence between the ends pursued by each person, which would obviate intrigue of any kind, is seen here as a hope that could be realized, if only people were willing. But it is elsewhere treated by Defoe as a pipe-dream, while the prevailing conditions are readily accepted. It is precisely the elaborate, indirect means which generally fascinate Defoe, more than the worthy end. Even in this passage, the wordy respect given to intrigue betrays its allure for the author.

The *Review* continues to be the setting for Defoe's most determined efforts to counteract his private political fantasies. This is perhaps most apparent during 1707-8, when he is acting as a secret agent in Scotland and elsewhere, attempting to facilitate the Act of Union. In November 1707, there is a rare flashback to the adulation of French political intrigue expressed in his memorandum to Harley and the early issues of the *Review*:

Cardinal Richlieu expended two Millions of *Livres* yearly, merely upon Intelligence, and by that means had his Fingers in all the Actions of *Europe*, was inform'd of every Motion, insinuated himself into every Cabinet, and in short manag'd all *Europe*; nor is there a greater Argument of a finished Statesman, that let it cost what it will, to have a certain and exact Intelligence in all Parts of the World, and by this to take his Measures from the earliest Motion or Posture of the Enemy.

⁴³ *Review*, II, 126a, 475b-476a. Curtis draws attention to the second passage in her useful discussion of Mr. Review's values: *The Elusive Daniel Defoe* (London: Vision, 1984), pp. 18-19. I share her view that there are two conflicting views of society in Defoe's work: 'the ideal world of the plain dealer', and 'the real world of the trickster'; but I would argue that she underestimates Defoe's own attraction to techniques of deception and manipulation.

For much of the last three years Defoe has been assiduously refraining from unqualified praise for such underhand methods. He is temporarily allowing the private relish for espionage, which he is communicating to Harley during these months, access to his main platform for public propaganda. In March that year he had written to Harley from Edinburgh:

In my Mannagemt here I am a perfect Emissary. I act the Old part of Cardinall Richlieu. I have my spyes and my Pensioners In Every place, and I Confess tis the Easyest thing in the World to hire people here to betray their friends.

Knowing that this brazen enthusiasm for the shadier side of politics must be restricted to his letters, Defoe seems to make a more concerted attempt during 1708 to quash any suspicions which his Machiavellian outburst of the previous November might have roused. He manages to explore the subject of 'Emissaries and Secret Spies' without leaving the reader in any doubt of his hostility to such outlandish innovations.

Richlieu's Emissaries were employ'd to introduce Tyranny, to raise in the People exalted Notions of their King, and quallify them to be rid upon by his Arbitrary Tyrannical Measures; to abuse and misrepresent the *Hugonots* on one Hand, that their Reduction might be approv'd by the Pope; and to prepare them and wheedle them on the other hand, to submit to the Mischiefs prepar'd for them.

The contrast with the letter to Harley could not be more stark. Defoe seems to recognize that he must publicly represent Richelieu as a destructive tyrant, rather than an enterprising political pioneer. But while denouncing emissaries, the passage betrays an understanding of their function which he has gained from undertaking such a role himself. In fact, part of the emissary's task described here is close to that which Defoe eagerly assumes with regard to the Dissenters in his 1704 memorandum: to ease a faction into being the instruments of a minister's rise to absolute power. Defoe's impudent pleasure in publicly contradicting his private enthusiasms is no more blatant than in his outrageous claim that emissaries have been unknown in England since James II's departure:

Where have been King *William's* Under-Spurleathers, or Queen *Ann's* Booted-Apostles? Princes that pursue Just Government, and Rule by Laws, scorn to descend to such base Methods, and their Reigns have been always free from the Artifice of such Measures; Ministers of State, who pursue the true Interest and Design of such Princes, never flie to such shifts.⁴⁴

This, coming from one who on his own admission has played such a part under both monarchs mentioned! While in the *Review*, for the most part, he upholds the Whig interpretation of the post-1688 period, secretly Defoe is seeing 'Artifice' as essential to stabilizing the government and boosting the career of his employer.

Those poems and pamphlets whose composition is contemporaneous with his letters to Harley during 1704 also reveal how Defoe publicly modified his enthusiasm for political chicanery. *The Dyet of Poland*, although not published until 1705, seems to have been near completion by mid-1704.⁴⁵ Here, political scheming is repeatedly identified with the recalcitrant factions responsible for the current party strife:

Statesmen are Gamesters, Sharp and Trick's the Play,
Kings are but Cullies, wheedl'd in to Pay;
The Courtiers Foot-balls, kick'd from one to one,
Are always Cheated, oftentimes Undone;

...

The jangling Statesmen clash in their Designs,
Fraud fights with Fraud, and Craft to Craft inclines;
Stifly engage, quarrel, accuse and hate,
And strive *for Leave* to help undo the State;
For all the strong Contention ends in this,
Who shall *the Pow'r of doing Ill* possess:
Envy and Strife are only rais'd so high,
Because a Man's a greater Knave than I:
But if can his Place and Wealth succeed,
He rails of Course, and I'm the Knave indeed.
Places and Pensions are the *Polish* Spoil
Will all sides please, and all sides reconcile.
'Tis natural to all the Sons of Men,
To *Rail* and *Plot* when out, be *Quiet* in.

⁴⁴ *Review*, IV, 470b; *Letters*, p. 211; *Review*, IV, 598a, 598a, 598b.

⁴⁵ See *Letters*, p. 19.

In this context, a 'statesman' is not an enterprising minister such as Harley, but a marginalized trouble-maker seeking to bring down the government to his own advantage. The intrigue that Defoe in private is seeing as a means of stabilizing Harley's position against the vortex of interests bidding for ministerial power, is publicly being depicted by him as a symptom of this same party strife. The crown and ministry are here at the mercy of plots and manoeuvres, rather than having recourse to them to control presumptuous factions. The heart of the poem is then taken up with a rogues' gallery of high-flying politicians, before Defoe suggests the qualities required in a responsible politician, imagining

... a States-man honest and upright,
Whom neither Knaves can bribe, nor Fools Invite;
Who with unbyass't hands can hold the Reins,
And seeks to save his Countries last Remains,
That loves the People and obeys the crown,
And seeks the Nations Safety, not his own.⁴⁶

This is a far cry from the maxims which Defoe is coining in his letters to Harley. Here the ideal minister is defined by his lack of self-interest and indifference to his own survival. There is only the faintest suggestion of political management in the image of holding 'the Reins' and balancing parties. It is worth noting that the ministers whom Defoe focuses upon are Godolphin and Marlborough, who were admittedly senior to Harley at this stage; but it is possible that he is making a conscious decision to place them in the ministerial foreground, ahead of the colleague whom he is privately exhorting to make himself prime minister.

The conclusion of the poem perhaps shows some affinity with his letters of 1704. He implies that factions are invariably so inept that their subversive schemes can be relied upon to backfire and inadvertently strengthen the state:

Of all the needful Helps to Sov'reign Rule,

⁴⁶ *The Dyet of Poland*, pp. 6-7, 54-5.

The Usefull'st Thing in Poland is a Fool;
 Among the Utensils of Government,
 No *Tool*, like Him, supplies the grand Intent:
 When he's in close *Cabal*, and *Council* set,
 To turn the monstr'ous *Wind-Mill* of the State,
 The huge, unweildy, tott'ring Fabrick stands
 Too Solid for his Head, too Heavy for his Hands:
 The Force Reverts, and with the swift Recoil,
 Assuming Statesmen perish in the Broil.
 So, Mischief like, the high returning Tide,
 Brings sure Destruction on it's Author's Head;
 As *Engineers*, that ill support their Mine,
 Sink in the Ruine of their own Design.
Poland, how strangely has thy Land been Blest,
 By Fools Redeem'd, when e'er by Knaves Opprest:
 The Graver Blockheads of thy tott'ring State,
 Protect thy Fame, and help to make thee Great.
 For when they might thy Government o'erthrow,
 The harmless *Things themselves* alone undo.
 The untrain'd Politicians court their Fate,
 If *Knaves* were never *Fools*, they'd soon blow up the State.⁴⁷

Defoe's plan for Harley to convince the various parties that he is effecting their different schemes, when in reality he is thwarting them, is here in spirit, but with the presiding figure of Harley removed. All the scheming is still being done by inimical factions, rather than by any member of the government. No feigned support for their aspirations is required here: they can be left to their own devices, in the confidence that these will redound to the benefit of the state. But the Machiavellian idea of an opponent being allowed to believe that he is furthering his interest, when the contrary is really the case, is discernible in these lines. A political marvel is being celebrated even in this context, through which those seeking to undermine the status quo become its props. However, the poem as a whole gives the impression of Defoe conscientiously exposing statecraft as self-defeating, even while he is privately recommending it to Harley.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 58-9.

The poem *Jure Divino* was also under way during this period.⁴⁸ While it is a work quite unpalatable to modern tastes, it does further illuminate Defoe's resolve to associate intrigue with dangerous extremism in the public mind. The poem eulogizes the post-1688 constitutional settlement as the best guarantee of stability in Europe, and it would be rash to dismiss this attitude as wholly affected. But, as I have shown, in private Defoe is less Whiggishly correct, entertaining the idea that some aspects of French politics might be surreptitiously introduced, without appearing to compromise the English settlement. To some extent, the zealous parading of Whig shibboleths in the poem can be construed as a calculating attempt to preclude public suspicion of his Machiavellian ideals.

Defoe's fascination with statecraft expresses itself through the poem's fixation on the quasi-mythical figure of the 'tyrant'. This abstract character is defined by an obscurity that enables Defoe to mystify a subject which he was giving a much more practical application in his letters:

Paint th' Infernal Man,
His Birth, his Fortune, and his Fate rehearse,
No Limner can *describe him like thy Verse*;
A Monster form'd of all the Shapes of Sin,
Something of Man without, *and Devil within*.
No Phrase his Sable Myst'ry can unfold,
His Story must be felt, it can't be *Told*. (JD, I, 3)

When it comes to giving particular examples, Defoe chooses similar figures to those cited in his letters to Harley, but now handled more as remote historical characters, than as models with an immediate relevance. Richelieu is certainly treated more ambivalently:

Richlieu the new *Apollo* might have stood,
But that his Wit was mingl'd so with Blood;
Let him the God of Politicks appear,
And influence all the Arts of Peace and War.
Who in his Government their *Birth-day* had,
Will both be *Witty, Bloody, Wise and Mad*. (JD, I, 20-1)

⁴⁸ See *Letters*, pp. 63-4. For a discussion of the poem, see Schonhorn, pp. 124-40.

Defoe grants him genius as a statesman, but, more than in the letters, qualifies this with abhorrence of his use of force. The footnote enlarges on this:

Richlieu was a Man of a vast Judgment, and prodigious Wit, founded the *French Academy*, and laid the Foundation of all their Improvement in Letters which they have since made; but withal, was bloody, arbitrary and implacable. (*JD*, I, 20-1)

He writes rather differently of Richelieu's ruthlessness to Harley, commending his use of 'Meer force', though considering it 'Impracticable' in an English context. He admires Richelieu's attempts to attain the paradoxical status of a popular tyrant:

We find this Cardinall strove hard for the Publick Voice, and Us'd a Thousand Artifices to Obtain it, Among which This was One, That he Never Appear'd to his Own Resentments, and tho' a Multitude of Persons of all Ranks, were Sacrific'd to his Politick Intrest, yet he Never would be seen in a Matter of Punishment; if a Pardon was to be Granted, he Took Care the Debt should be to the Cardinall, but if Justice was to be Done, That was In the king.⁴⁹

Defoe tacitly approves of Richelieu's absolute authority here, though he reserves overt praise for the way he designs his harshest measures so that any popular backlash is directed at the King, leaving his own reputation for generosity unaffected. It is just such an oblique application of power that Harley has the opportunity to refine in an English context. If, in *Jure Divino*, Defoe intends a genuine criticism of the French minister for his use of violence, he might have added his preference for the delicate manoeuvre to sheer night.⁵⁰

Another noteworthy passage is that on Charles IX of France, which warns against the kind of dissimulation that Defoe has been urging Harley to adopt:

He shall the God of Hypocrites be own'd,
And Janus from his Temple be post-pon'd;
The Birth this *Pointing Star* shall e're engage,
Shall be the best Dissemblers of the Age;

⁴⁹ *Letters*, p. 34.

⁵⁰ For Defoe's conflicting public and private views of Richelieu, see Schonhorn, pp. 102-3.

Like him they'll Smile and Kill, Embrace and Hate,
 And under fawning Kisses prompt your Fate.
 May Nature Plant upon th' unhappy Brow,
 Some Fatal Frown that Men the Wretch may know;
 That all dissembling Art can never hide,
 And Innocents may guilty Snares avoid. (*JD*, I, 21)

It is just this combination of suavity and ruthlessness that Defoe imagines Harley using as he makes overtures to each party. Here he prays for these methods to fail. But one can still detect an appraisal of such conduct in the titles and superlatives that Defoe bestows upon Richelieu and Charles: his denunciation of these representative tyrants never quite suppresses his curiosity about their political means. This is evident also in his footnote on Charles, which offers an example of his hypocrisy:

Charles the ninth carress'd the Admiral *Coligni*, with all the Tokens and Marks of Friendship; visited him when he had been wounded, and assassinated, wept over him, and ordered him a pretended Guard for his Security, yet at the same time had resolv'd to murder him, and caus'd it to be done the next day. (*JD*, I, 21)

Defoe might have offered such an example approvingly to Harley in his memorandum.

Stressing the advantages of a reputation for generosity and compassion, he had told Harley how the King of Sweden, Gustavus Adolphus

Allwayes Employ'd Trusty Persons in the Towns and Cittyes he Reduc'd, to Inform Themselves of any known Case where one was Oppress'd, or any Family That had the Generall Pitty; and Unlook'd for, Unask'd, he would Send for, Right, and Reliev Them.⁵¹

The fascination with the type of manoeuvre by which someone resolutely has their own way, yet preserves a reputation for disinterested actions, is common to both examples, despite the fact that one is intended to incite horror, and the other emulation.

Book VII is one of the more impressive parts of the poem, with its Miltonic depiction of Hell as a parliament or cabinet room where plots against Man are hatched. Man's soul is seen as subject to a form of arbitrary government by 'Sin' and 'Crime', and

⁵¹ *Letters*, p. 31. Charles IX's treatment of Coligni reappears as an example of Satan's management through human agents in *The Political History of the Devil*, pp. 276-7.

human tyrants are its minions. Most revealingly, absolutism is tricked out as a supreme manoeuvre perpetrated by Hell against Mankind:

Satyr, the Depths of *Satan's* Kingdom view,
 And tell us what Infernal States-Men do:
 The vast Occasion entertain with Joy,
 And view the Arts which all the World destroy:
 The huge Machin of Sin; the Wheel of Fate;
 The Council of the Dark Infernal State;
 See how the Spring of Ruin there appears,
 Regard the Engin and the Engineers;
 How they in strict Confederacy appear,
 With all the modern Men of Mischief here:
 What unseen Springs the secret Spells convey;
 How Devils rule, and Men by Force obey:
 How *Villains here* the fatal Consort keep,
 Cohere with all the Councils of the Deep:
 How *Devils there* the secret Gust infuse,
 And prompt Mankind to all the Ills they chuse;
 Allure the Mind, and secret Hints convey,
 And suit those Hints to Minds that will obey:
 How thus the immortal Prince of Mischief reigns,
 And binds the captive World in unseen Chains:
 The hideous Influence of Sin directs,
 And forms the Source which only Heaven detects.
 (JD, VII, 14-5)

Several points of interest arise from this passage. Human tyrants are viewed as the casualties of exactly the kind of sneaky manipulation Defoe envisages Harley accomplishing in his letters. They are allowed to believe that they are ruthlessly pursuing their own interest, when all the time they are merely the tools whereby Hell establishes its interest in this world. Hell is the wheel within the wheels of human statecraft, imperceptibly moving the others in a direction contrary to that which is apparent. It is worth noting how the passage calls for the sort of close attention to the minutiae of political intrigue, evoked by its use of mechanical imagery, that Defoe gives in his letters and published secret histories; but here it can be done less controversially. Defoe's fascination with political subterfuge has been displaced onto an imaginary underworld,

remote from the arena of contemporary politics. He was to return to this device later on a much greater scale in *The Political History of the Devil*. That work reveals Defoe quite consciously exploring the kind of political management which had preoccupied him during his time as a political journalist through a satirical treatment of the Devil. The verse that appears on the book's title-page could be read as a candid explanation of the process of transferral which the work exploits:

*Bad as he is, the Devil may be abus'd,
Be falsly charg'd, and causelessly accus'd,
When Men, unwilling to be blam'd alone,
Shift off those Crimes on Him which are their Own.*

In *Jure Divino*, written at a time when Defoe was serving a rising minister, it was even more vital that his interest in methods of political manipulation should be concealed behind the more academic subject-matter of the Devil.

Defoe presents as the dupes of Satan's conspiracy some of the historical examples who merit a discerning appraisal in his memorandum to Harley:

View there the *Richlieus* of the Infernal State;
And view there the Arts of Hell to *manage Fate*;
The *Spencers*, *Buckinghams*, and Men of Fame,
And see how they confer with *Not ____ ham*. (JD, VII, 15)

Here, Richelieu, Spencer and Buckingham have to rub shoulders with a high-flying opportunist like Nottingham, whom Defoe genuinely despises. They are all lumped together as the 'various Sorts of Tools' (JD, VII, 15) which Hell employs in its exploitation of human nature.⁵²

A good example of Defoe applying the style of popular Machiavellian literature to Satan's plot against Man, is the footnote about the promotion of Belus into an earthly idol, at the start of Book VIII:

⁵² Defoe mentions Spencer and Buckingham in his list of would-be English prime ministers in his memorandum to Harley: *Letters*, p. 30. Nottingham had offered a reward for Defoe's arrest for *The Shortest-Way*: see *Letters*, pp. 1-4.

The Policy of Hell was very remarkable in this, for that *Belus* having been a just Prince, and well-belov'd; the People were the easier deluded into the belief of his Deity, and were the sooner drawn in to idolize him whom they lov'd here, whose Name was so familiar to them, and whose Memory had obtain'd great Reverence among them

This was Hell's Master-piece for Idolatry; and denying the true God, being the End, the Medium, or who they should worship, was not at all material, but one answer'd the Devil's Design as well as another, and it was only significant to him, to set up this or that Prince as God, which would soonest prevail upon the People. (*JD*, VIII, 1)

Hell is seen as having consummated an impressive 'masterpiece of policy', turning Belus into an effective instrument with which to hold sway over Man, but without him appearing to his own people to have changed his status.

The poem exploits the popular taste for political intrigue as much as Defoe's later secret histories, but the topic is attached to historical bogeymen, contemporary party nuisances and a mythical 'Hell'. There is no suggestion that a contemporary English ministry might plot against its opponents. Statecraft is understood to mean only the attempted subversion of the state by self-interested factions, through whom Hell attempts to fulfil its plans. But it is ultimately unsuccessful, thwarted by the constitution and the government upholding it:

See Satyr there, *the stricter League* maintain'd;
With all the *Party-Furies* of this Land;
How secret *Mines* and subterranean *Schemes*,
Are laid to force the Nation to *Extremes*:
See how defeated Hell's inrag'd to find,
Their Friends, their Hopes, and Parties too declin'd:
Their baffl'd States-Men sending back for Aid;
Their Party scatter'd, and their Schemes betray'd:
Blasted at once, from bright *Britannia's* Throne,
Hell's bauk'd; the shagrin Fiends the Conquest own.
(*JD*, VII, 16)

In contrast to these underhand party rebels, the Queen and her ministry are celebrated in Book XII for their moral rectitude and integrity. Somers, Halifax, Godolphin and Marlborough are commended for their wisdom and sense; while the characteristics

esteemed by Defoe in his letters at this time are not even hinted at in this context. It is not the statesman's recourse to playing opposing factions against each other that renders the Queen's position invulnerable, but the judicious government of the magistrate:

Then view th'admired Train, and *humbly own*,
 The Pers'nal Glories *that surround* Her Throne:
These are the Panegyricks of Her Reign,
 And *these* the mighty *Load of Power* sustain;
 By these, she softly guides the Reins of State,
 And sanctifies the Name of Magistrate:
 For Truth alone intails th'exalted Line,
 And Justice makes Authority Divine;
 Surrounded thus, no Danger can approach,
 She heals *contagious Factions* with Her gentle Touch:
These her Infallibility create,
 And make the Throne an Oracle of State,
 And he that disobeys, *deserves his Fate*. (JD, XII, 3-4)

While the end of stability and security in government is also important in Defoe's letters to Harley, the means described here are quite different. The Queen is depicted as a genuinely conciliatory arbitrator, while in Defoe's private scheme this is only to serve as a bland front for Harley's uncompromising manipulation of factions.

The most revealing work in gestation during this period, is the prose secret history *The Consolidator*.⁵³ It reflects Defoe's confused position on statecraft, mostly associating it with high-flying losers, yet dwelling on it meticulously in the appreciative manner of popular Machiavellism. Political intrigue, albeit concocted by factions of whom Defoe disapproves, is the work's *raison d'être*. The popular, Lucianic political allegory, which Swift was to parody and complicate in *Gulliver's Travels*, must have seemed to Defoe the ideal release-valve for his stifled fascination with backstairs politics. Its fantastic strategy, though intentionally transparent, distances the work from contemporary politics enough for Defoe to feel less chary of indulging this enthusiasm.

⁵³ It was published on 26 March 1705: see *Review*, II, 40b; *Letters*, p. 83.

The genre playfully refurbishes familiar political events as a series of exotic spectacles, customs and adventures, apparently witnessed by the traveller-narrator. This comes easily to Defoe, having grown up with popular histories which were prone to overdramatizing politics for the amusement of their readers. Something of his relish for the task in hand is conveyed by his description of one of the objects visible through the Lunarians' miraculous telescope:

State Polity, in all its Meanders, Shifts, Turns, Tricks, and Contraries, are so exactly Delineated and Describ'd, That they are in hopes in time to draw a pair of Globes out, to bring off those things to a certainty.

Not but that it made some Puzzle, even among these Clear-sighted Nations, to determine what *Figure* the Plans and Drafts of this undiscover'd *World of Mysteries* ought to be describ'd in: Some were of Opinion, it ought to be an *Irregular Centagon*, a Figure with an Hundred *Cones* or Angles: Since the *Unaccountables* of this State-Science, are hid in a Million of *undiscover'd Corners*; as the Craft, Subtilty and Hypocrisy of Knaves and Courtiers have concealed them, never to be found out, but by this wonderful *D___l-scope*. (*Con*, pp. 73-4)

There is an ambivalence here which pervades much of the work. The prevailing tone is ironic, implicitly condemning murky political cabals, much as Defoe is doing in the *Review* by this stage. But the passage is also driven by a straight fascination with the idea of scrutinizing and tracking such machinations. The narrative itself assumes the telescope's function, postulating a sequence of serpentine manoeuvres behind the major events of recent history.

As in the poems of this period which I have discussed, *The Consolidator* represents 'the vast mysterious dark World of *State Policy*' (*Con*, p. 82) as the natural terrain of the High Tories, or 'high Solunarians', as they appear here. But the work differs in its greater readiness to apply, albeit ironically, a vocabulary drawn from Machiavellian literature to their exploits. Take this description of how the Solunarians, according to the narrator, surpass the casuistry of English factions:

The Arts and Excellencies of sublime Reasonings are carried up to all the extraordinaries of *banishing Scruples*, reconciling Contradictions, *uniting*

Opposites, and all the necessary Circumstances requir'd in a compleat Casuist ... they obtain a most refin'd Method of distinguishing *Truth it self into Seasons and Circumstances*, and so can bring any thing to be Truth, when it serves the turn that happens just then to be needful, and make the same thing to be false at another time. (*Con*, p. 180)

Irony is inherently ambivalent, as the author vicariously entertains ideas and arguments contrary to those which he would claim to hold. It always risks misinterpretation and suspicion among its readers. A comparison between Defoe's published and unpublished writings during 1704-5 confirms that irony affords him a temporary means of resolving the tension between his private views and public duties. In importing the mock-aesthetic jargon and awestruck tone which, in the *Review* and private letters, he flourishes with little trace of irony, Defoe is treading a precarious line between disparagement and appreciation of such conduct. In his memorandum to Harley, hypocrisy is sanctioned by a form of casuistical reasoning:

Tho' this Part of Conduct is Call'd Dissimulation, I am Content it shall be Call'd what They will, But as a Lye Does Not Consist in the Indirect Position of words, but in the Design by False Speaking, to Deciev and Injure my Neighbour, So Dissembling does Not Consist in Putting a Different Face Upon Our Actions, but in the further Applying That Concealment to the Prejudice of the Person.

He adduces the following example: that if your house is on fire, it is best to conceal your urgency from a neighbour who is prone to convulsions when in a state of shock, and to persuade them more calmly to leave their room on another account. Defoe then declares: 'Will any Man Tax me with Hypocrisie and Dissimulation?'⁵⁴ For all his emphasis upon a disinterested goal, Defoe takes a certain pleasure in his own casuistical agility here; there is a hint of triumph in the final rhetorical question, at having indisputably passed off deception as decency. The feat which Defoe envisages Harley accomplishing, of appearing to each conflicting party as a kindred spirit, is in fact not dissimilar to the high Solunarian practices that are celebrated with apparent irony. They too can vary their appearance at

⁵⁴ *Letters*, p. 42.

will, or revise 'Truth' as Defoe himself does in his letter to Harley. The difference lies only in the particular end pursued. The ingenious means are of general fascination to Defoe.

The account of the Solunarians' betrayal of the prince whom they have helped to establish particularly merits attention. The episode corresponds to the High Tories' participation in the Revolution, against their principles of passive obedience and non-resistance, which is also an important theme in *Jure Divino*. A 'cunning Fellow personating a *Solunarian*', who is really a 'Crolian' (Dissenter), explains to the Solunarians how they might undermine their prince, without appearing to have abandoned their belief in his absolute prerogative:

But we have laid our Measures so that by prompting the King to *run upon us* in all sorts of bare-fac'd Extrems and Violences, we shall bring him to exasperate the whole Nation; then we may underhand foment the breach on this Side, raise the Mob upon him, and by acting on both sides seem to suffer a Force in falling in with the People, and preserve our Reputation.

Thus we shall bring the Thing to pass, *betray our Prince*, take Arms *against his Power*, call in *Foreign Force* to do the Work, and even then keep our Hands seemingly out of the Broil, by being pretended Sticklers for our former Prince; so save our Reputation, and bring all to pass with Ease and Calmness; while the eager Party of the *Abrogratzians* [Catholics] will do their own Work by expecting we will do it for them ... The *Crolians* astonish'd both at the Policy, the Depth, the Knavery and the Hypocrisy of the Design, left them to carry it on, owning it was a Master-piece of Craft, and so stood still to observe the Issue, which every way answer'd the exactness of its Contrivance. (*Con*, pp. 143-4)

The Solunarians are offered a scheme by which they can attain their end largely through the exertions of the people, resentful of the prince's rapid move towards a foreign religion; the military strength of a foreign power, ready to extend its influence; and the quiescence of the Abrogratzians (Catholics), convinced that their religion is being established. All the Solunarians have to do is to misinform the prince and bide their time until the Revolution, when they can appear to resist these developments, before reluctantly yielding to political realities. They can effortlessly combine flagrant apostasy and a favourable reputation. It is exactly the kind of manoeuvre which Defoe secretly relishes, as it enlists three different parties unwittingly into the service of the one party co-ordinating the scheme.

But Defoe is elevating into a brilliant artifice, in terms that he could use elsewhere with exhilaration rather than irony, an affair which he considers proof of the High Church's unsuitability for government. The ambiguity is heightened when the reader is reminded that the whole scheme has been suggested to the Solunarians by a disguised Crolian. It proves to be a manoeuvre within a larger manoeuvre designed by the Crolian to undermine the high Solunarian interest. In this light, the Machiavellian terms of appraisal can to some extent be taken at face value, as they extol a contrivance which ultimately redounds to the advantage of Defoe's allies, the Dissenters, and exposes the High Tories.

Another example of the work's tendency towards ambivalence occurs when it describes how a Solunarian peer pretends to have converted to the Abrogratzian religion, so that he can become the prince's favourite and push him to the necessary extremes to spark a revolution. This favourite is soon in the position where he can give the prince advice that is plainly against his interest, until the prince is 'now made but a meer Engine, or Machine, screwed up or down by this false Counsellor to act his approaching Destruction with his own Hand' (*Con*, p. 159). Defoe's evaluation of Solunarian cunning can be taken as ironic, but he does not do enough to exclude a neutral reading.

It was therefore a master-piece of Policy in the *Solunarian* Church-men to place a feign'd Convert near their Prince, who shou'd always biass him with contrary Advices, puff him up with vast prospect of Success, prompt him to all Extreame, and always Fool him with the certainty of bringing Things to pass his own way. (*Con*, pp. 161-2)

An ironic interpretation would have been particularly hard for a reader who recalled the early issues of the *Review*, where the same style had been applied to similar manoeuvres, to demonstrate the political sophistication that underpins France's military success. The passage can give the impression that Defoe's respect for the technique outweighs his disapproval of those exercising it.

Defoe's confused position on political intrigue is most evident in his treatment of a pact between high Solunarians and Crolians. Here, he offers an episode parallel to one

surrounding the Occasional Conformity Bill of 1702. A High Church faction, holding a grudge against those who had been urging moderation, had decided secretly to scupper the bill, in cahoots with its target, the Dissenters. Defoe introduces this affair as 'one of the *subtilest, foolishhest, deep, shallow* Contrivances and *Plots* that ever was hatcht or set on foot by any Party of Men in the whole Moon' (*Con*, p. 215). The deliberate juxtaposition of contradictory adjectives is revealing. Over twenty years later, Defoe gives a very similar description of Satan's management as

the most consummate Fool's Policy, the most profound simple Craft, and the most subtle shallow Management of Things that can by our weak Understanding be conceiv'd.⁵⁵

These passages show Defoe almost exposing Machiavellian buzz-words like 'consummate', 'profound' and 'subtle', in the manner of Davenant's essays. They suggest how consciously he used these terms, taking pleasure in the superficial prestige which they bestow upon acts of deception, but also recognizing their artificiality.

Defoe pays tribute to the skill with which the high-flying faction derails the bill, while appearing to be over-zealously promoting it:

Now as these sorts of Plots must always be carry'd very nicely, so these *high Gentlemen* who Confederated with the *Crolians*, having, to spight the other, resolv'd effectually to prevent the passing the Law against *the Qualification of the Crolians*, it was not their Business immediately to declare themselves *against* it as a Law, but by still loading it with some Extravagance or other, and pushing it on to some intolerable Extreme, *secure its Miscarriage*. (*Con*, pp. 218-9)

It is this tendency to appraise a manoeuvre by general, aesthetic criteria, irrespective of those responsible for it, that takes the edge off Defoe's attack on High Tory politics. He tells how they employed a priest who wrote '*so dexterously*' (*Con*, p. 221) in support of the Bill, and in opposition to the Crolians, that many of the Solunarians began to find it too extreme for their taste.

⁵⁵ *The Political History of the Devil*, p. 205.

But as he increasingly emphasizes the Crolians' role in this scheme, he switches to suggesting the political inferiority of the high Solunarians. They are belittled as '*impolitick*' (*Con*, p. 217) for adding so many strict clauses to the bill that they break the Church consensus surrounding it. Defoe comments that 'had they contented themselves *by little and little* to ha' done their Work, they had done it effectually' (*Con*, p. 217). In contrast to the poems of this period, the High Tories are being mocked not so much for their intriguing, as for their lack of guile and finesse. On the other hand, the adroitness of the Crolians in masterminding this scheme is played up. Defoe observes

the farther Progress of this most refin'd piece of Cunning, among the *very great Ones, Grandees, Feathers, and Consolidators* of the Country. For these *Cunning Crolians* manag'd their Intrigues so nicely, that they brought about a Famous Division even among the *High Solunarian Party themselves*. (*Con*, p. 225)

The High Solunarian faction become merely the industrious tools of the Crolians, taking the bill to such unacceptable extremes, that the other Solunarians must either reject it, or precipitate a civil war or even foreign invasion. The faction may have 'plaid the *surest Game*, to blast and overthrow this Law, that could possibly be plaid' (*Con*, p. 226), but the perfection of this plot ultimately serves only the Crolians' interest. Defoe concludes the episode by implying that the Crolians have been the wheel within the wheels of the plot all along:

It must be allow'd these *Crolians* were Cunning People, thus to wheedle in these *High Flying Solunarians* to break the Neck of their dear Project.

But upon the whole, for ought I cou'd see, whether it went one way or t'other, all the Nation esteem'd the other People *Fools* --- *Fools* of the most extraordinary Size *in all the Moon*, for *either way* they pull'd down what they had been many Years a Building. (*Con*, pp. 227-8)

Now, Solunarians are characterized by an imprudence that makes them fit only to be made the cogs in others' manoeuvres, while the Crolians are distinguished by their unrivalled manipulation of their enemies. The Solunarian faction's earlier adroitness, then admired by Defoe, is finally shown to have been misapplied. But while celebrating the tactical

superiority of the Dissenters over the High Tories might seem more in keeping with Defoe's politics, it also complicates *The Consolidator's* polemics. For, consequently, the language and tone of Machiavellian literature have not been used with consistent irony. Means common to High Tories and Dissenters are appraised in a common vocabulary. The two parties are only distinguished by their success or failure at promoting their interests by these methods.

The episode seems to reflect the scenario which Defoe imagines in his letters to Harley, but, as in *The Dyet of Poland*, with Harley's supervision extracted, and perhaps substituted by the Crolians. The fragmentation of the Solunarians has been beneficial to the Crolians, just as Defoe privately sees how Harley might more successfully manipulate the parties by keeping them divided. As he remarks after this episode,

The Author of this cannot but observe here that as *England* is unhappily divided among Parties, so it has this one Felicity even to be found in the very Matter of her Misfortunes, that those Parties are all again subdivided among themselves ... Thus the *fatal Errors of Men* have their advantages, the separate ends they serve are not foreseen by their Authors, and they *do good* against the very *Design of the People*, and the nature of the Evil it self. (*Con*, pp. 232-6)

Instead of having a figure like Harley taking advantage of these circumstances, the parties' schemes automatically redound to the benefit of the state. But Defoe is coming dangerously close to the calculating acceptance of a situation which, in his other works of this period, he is conscientiously denouncing.

By giving play to his private adhesion to Machiavellian values in *The Consolidator*, Defoe undoes his efforts elsewhere to closely identify 'Policy' with high-flying factions. The work sometimes shades into a kind of manual, vindicating craft above gut reaction in politics.

It was always my Opinion in Affairs *on this side the Moon*, that tho' sometimes a foolish Bolt may hit the Point, and a random Shot kill the Enemy, yet that generally Discretion and Prudence of Mannagement, had the Advantage, and met with a proportion'd Success, and things were, or were not happy, in their Conclusion as they were, more or less wisely Contriv'd and Directed.

And tho' it may not be allow'd to be so here, yet I found it more constantly so there, Effects were true to their Causes, and confusion of Councils never fail'd in the *Moon* to be follow'd by distracted and destructive Consequences. (*Con*, p. 340)

If Defoe initially intended to use the fantastic setting to satirize high Tory hypocrisy, by the end it has become a means of canonizing his political ideals. The moon is a place where everyone has recourse to Machiavellian intrigue, and where only the most rarefied machinations succeed. Defoe remarks earlier that

Of all the *Richlieus*, *Mazarines*, *Gondamours*, *Oliver Cromwels*, and the whole Train of Politicians that our World has produc'd, the greatest of their Arts are Follies to the unfathomable depth of these *Lunarian Policies*. (*Con*, p. 145)

He is perhaps only partly defaming the High Tories by association. To some extent, Lunarian politics does represent for Defoe a kind of utopia founded on the Machiavellian principles attributed to these ministers in popular accounts of their careers, offering innumerable opportunities to him as author to dwell upon such methods. But for all Defoe's indiscretions in *The Consolidator*, he is still far from suggesting that Machiavellian methods might be profitably adopted by a government minister. General factions rather than individuals are for the moment the exponents of such politics in his work.

When Harley was elbowed from government by Godolphin and Marlborough in February 1708, Defoe remained in the ministry's employment, but under the auspices of the much less dynamic Godolphin. It must have seemed for a while that his notion of a contemporary successor to the Machiavellian statesmen of popular myth would remain a fantasy. But Harley's return to government in July 1710 as Chancellor of the Exchequer brought the minister closer to realizing Defoe's ambitions for him than ever before. After Guiscard's botched assassination attempt in March 1711, Harley's popularity escalated, and he returned to Parliament in April as Lord High Treasurer and Earl of Oxford. He had effectively attained the position of prime minister which Defoe had urged him to pursue over six years before. It seems more than coincidence, then, to find Defoe at exactly this moment placing the figure of Harley at the centre of a pamphlet for the first time.

A Spectators Address to the Whigs, written immediately after Guiscard's attempt, tries to bring home to the Whigs what would have been the consequences for the nation if Guiscard had succeeded. Defoe now feels free to stress Harley's pre-eminence as a minister, although it is a portrait that generally complies with the official Harleian line. His 'Conduct', 'Management' and 'Prudence' have

kept Quiet, & brought to Temper the Heats & Passions of Parties, and not suffer'd the Two Sides of Whig and Tory to meet together in a Storm; but letting them both run on, and spend their Fury in their proper Channels, causes them to Ebb Gently, & lose themselves Insensibly in the Great Ocean of Moderation.

This view of Harley as appeaser of parties would not have looked out of place in *Faults on Both Sides*, and it is a good example of Defoe fine-tuning his presentation of the minister to suit a particular audience. Towards the end of this description, Harley's role becomes almost passive, leaving the factions to exhaust themselves before becoming absorbed into the prevailing moderation. But Defoe does go on to hint at a more manipulative Harley, as he speculates which party might lie behind the assassination attempt. Church-men, Dissenters, Tories and Whigs can all be rejected as possibilities, because they are all obliged to Harley in some way. For example, the Tories could not have planned it,

for he has shared the Management of the Nation without Distinction, to Them as well as to other Men; it is by him they are Protected in the Exercise of that Power they Enjoy; and whenever he pleases to withdraw from them, they can no longer Support themselves; they must be worse than Mad if they did it.⁵⁶

There is a faint echo here of Defoe's vision of Harley courting the favour of each faction, convincing them that, however uncomfortable they may feel with some of his measures, ultimately they have a vested interest in him leading the ministry. Harley astutely exploits the Hobbesian political maelstrom, where factions will readily make themselves dependent on anyone who can offer them a taste of power.

⁵⁶ *A Spectators Address to the Whigs* (London, 1711), pp. 10, 12.

Harley is placed even more in the foreground in another pamphlet written during that Spring, *Eleven Opinions About Mr. H_____y*. Its central strategy of retailing the opinions of the minister held by a number of factions creates the impression of him presiding quite uniquely over political events, as if all factions, whatever their views, revolve around this one minister. In the introductory section on Harley, Defoe offers a more daring portrayal of him than had hitherto been possible, now confidently insinuating elements of his 1704 counsels into a public tract:

Mr. H_____y is the Person of whom we are now to speak; -- A Name heard perhaps, and repeated for some Years past, with as great a Variety of Temper among us, and as much affecting the Passions of the People, as any in these Parts of the World, since the great *Richelieu* in *France*, the first Founder of the *Gallick* Glory.

To compare a minister with Richelieu was always risky, even though it is a rather Davenant-ish view of the Cardinal as the seminal mind behind the rise of France. Defoe carefully omits the kind of manoeuvres with which he associates Richelieu elsewhere. But generally in this tract, the more controversial Harley, which Defoe had developed in their private correspondence, upstages the man of moderation. He is a figure who only rouses strong opinions, whether for or against. Defoe tells how the Queen was happy to return Harley to government,

to see him at the Head of Affairs, directing, advising, managing, and, as some Men are pleased to call him, is the prime Minister of State; tho' indeed, by the Constitution of our Affairs, the Administration admits of no such Title, no not in the Nature of it.⁵⁷

Defoe has it both ways over Harley's title, applying it to him, though only through the indirect testimony of others. He then implies that he is not one who holds such an opinion and invokes the constitution that had seemed such an irrelevance in his letters to Harley about how to attain such a status.

⁵⁷ *Eleven Opinions about Mr. H_____y* (London: J. Baker, 1711), pp. 12, 14.

But the pamphlet does more than emphasize Harley's significance. It intimates that he has every faction contributing to his security in government, either by making them reliant on him, or by their hostility redounding to his benefit, just as Defoe had originally imagined. One way of obliquely suggesting Harley's Machiavellian credentials is to contrast the political ineptitude of certain factions, and their low expectations of Harley, with his triumphant success at establishing a stable ministry. The old ministry, according to Defoe, both underestimated Harley's abilities and displayed an ignorance of political axioms. They were confident,

That neither his Interest in the Queen, his Vigour in Management, or his Politicks, could ever recover him, when he was once out ... This, unless we call it meer Distraction, made them, contrary to all the Rules of good Politicians, treat him not with the usual outside Civility, that Courtiers generally do those they supplant, letting them fall easily, and sweetening their Discontent with little Gratifications; Good Works, Promises, Kicking up Stairs, giving some trifle to keep them depending, and the like. But as a Man dashes a Piece of Glass against a Stone, never to be set together again; so they treated him with all that contempt, disdain, and if we may call it so, ill Manners; that left no room for them ever to come into speaking Terms again with him ... they acted by no Rules of Wisdom or Politicks, and were but too fatally mistaken in their Opinion; forgetting *Julius Caesar's* Maxim of War, *never to despise an Enemy*; and the Old Philosopher's Rule of Political Friendship, (*Viz.*) always to live with your Friend, as if he might one Day be your Enemy; and with your Enemy as if he might one Day be your Friend.⁵⁸

They showed the kind of crude, unimaginative political antagonism that Defoe rejected in his 1704 memorandum. Their chief failing was in taking no precautions against future contingencies, an essential Machiavellian virtue, complacently leaving a disgruntled former colleague on the side-line waiting for his moment. Defoe summons exactly the kind of maxims he had offered to Harley, stressing the importance of currying favour with one's enemies. He leaves it to the reader to infer that Harley observes these maxims in his own political conduct.

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 27-9.

The Whigs' assumption that Harley could not survive without the full support of the City is mocked in similar terms.

They have lived to see one Maxim they depended upon, proved false by a clear Demonstration, and themselves greatly deceived in it, viz. *That they that have the Money, must have the Management*; whereas, on the contrary, it is a Maxim more just, and founded upon a firmer Rule of Politicks, tho' not so frequently put in Practice, (viz.) *That they that have the Management, will have the Money*, and where else are all your Fancies of Tyranny, Oppression, and arbitrary Power.⁵⁹

This expresses rather indirectly Defoe's belief that government is primarily a matter of manoeuvring for greater security. Once again he subtly identifies Harley with political cunning by indicating its absence in his opponents.

But the tract marks a new departure in Defoe's propaganda in its more overt depiction of Harley manipulating the High Tories. Even a few days before Guiscard's attempt, Defoe was offering a foretaste of this theme. In the *Review*, he mocks high-fliers as congenitally incapable of taking advantage of political opportunities when they arise, and fit only to be exploited by governments. This attitude enables Defoe to celebrate the ministry's manipulation of them as a quite natural and inevitable development, as well as a feat of political management to be relished:

Now is it not very odd, to see how nicely the new Managers work with these *Tools*, call'd High Flyers; how cleverly all the Business is done by the Agency of High-Church, but against its very Principles and Foundations: How neatly the *Jacobite* Gentlemen in a certain Place, have been brought in to Act the Whig, and to own the Succession of the House of *Hannover*? -- How cleverly they have been made to talk the Language of the Revolution, at the same time that they hate the very Name of it, and Damn the Word: How finely have our High Church Men been brought with Patience, to hear the Parliament call the Dissenters *Fellow Christians*, in their Address to the Queen?⁶⁰

Through a succession of appreciative adverbs, Defoe lingers over the ministry's success in contriving matters so that the Tories establish the very policies to which they are

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 43.

⁶⁰ *Review*, VII, 586b-587a.

implacably opposed. He applauds the way the faction has been roundly defeated not by open confrontation, but unobtrusively, by taking them into power, the more easily to have them contribute to the ministry's stability. But here Defoe still refrains from attributing this contrivance to Harley alone.

In *Eleven Opinions*, Defoe particularizes the account, producing a more conceivable contest between the presiding manager, Harley, and the Tory ginger-group, the October Club. The faction is seen as having such an immature understanding of politics, that they 'required to be led, and to be governed'. They resent Harley's authority as children do that of parents or schoolmasters. Greater risks can be taken in describing the manipulation of such a group of marginalized extremists than is possible with the Whigs, although Defoe still hides behind the Club's own testimony. They view Harley

as of one that has defeated all their Hopes, disappointed all their Expectations, out-witted their Politicks, and in short, confounded all their Devices.

Defoe characteristically fashions Harley's treatment of the Club into a neat manoeuvre: the more the Club resent the way Harley has undermined their interest, the clearer it is to the Dissenters that he has their interests at heart.

And as the Malice and Rage of their Party is pointed singly at Mr. H____y, who they look upon as the only Instrument who has put a Hook into their Nostril, has tied their Hands, and restrained them, when they thought the Game all their own; it cannot but shew the Dissenters, that the same Reasons that these People give for their Resentment, ought to be most powerful with them, to convince them what they owe to the same Hand, since the Interests are so exactly the Reverse of one another, that they cannot but be Gainers by every Thing, where the others are Losers.⁶¹

This is interesting partly because it shows how Defoe, given the freedom, liked to shape political affairs into attractive formulae, usually with one party gaining at the expense of another; but also because it depicts Harley as manager without suggesting that he is acting from self-interest. It is the Dissenters who reap the benefit of his conduct. What makes

⁶¹ *Eleven Opinions About Mr. H____y*, pp. 57, 58-9, 53-4.

Eleven Opinions such an expert performance is the way Defoe seizes the opportunity offered by Harley's sudden popularity to work his Machiavellian ideals into a public tract, but still exercises caution and evasion to present a widely acceptable interpretation of the minister.

Defoe continues to be more permissive towards his long-suppressed political conceits in another pamphlet of this period, the first part of *The Secret History of the October Club*. The work is preoccupied with a favourite topic of Defoe's, the unholy alliance serving a temporary end. He cites the example of the coalition between the Junto Whigs and the Tories against the ministry, which culminated in the Scottish elections of 1708. The alliance was at its most bizarre in Scotland, with the Squadrone Whigs, backed by the Junto in England, forming an electoral pact with the Tories and even some Jacobites.⁶² He comments:

This unhappy League, as it had no view to the real Conjunction of their Intrest, any more than it had of their Principles, so it appear'd to be altogether Political, either side making use of the other as Tools, the better to compass the ruin of the Party they opposed, with Resolutions equally false to one another, when their own end should be brought to pass.

It is a classic example of 'reason of state', temporary political needs being placed above any consideration of principles, moral or political. The fact that these two parties are 'perfect *Antipodes* in the Design and End', both motivated only by the desire to replace the ministry and intending to cold-shoulder their current allies immediately on gaining power, only makes them all the more fascinating for Defoe.⁶³

He had for a long time been consciously associating such intrigue with factions buffeting the government. But now he introduces into this context the ministry's handling

⁶² Defoe was present in Scotland during the election: see Backscheider, pp. 253-8; Owens and Furbank, 'Defoe as Secret Agent: Three Unpublished Letters', *The Scriblerian*, 25 (1993), 145-53.

⁶³ *The Secret History of the October Club*, part I (London, 1711), pp. 13, 15.

of the High Tories, drooling over their toothsome feats of manipulation. He shows himself to be conscious of the hazards involved in defending the ministry in such terms, and of the reputation he is already acquiring, after having aired these ideas in the *Review*. But he justifies it by claiming that the October Club are only fit to be used in this way:

If this looks a little like what a bitter Writer, *the Review*, calls making Tools of some Men, it is only of such who want temper to act from proper Measures.

However, he is basically showing the ministry resorting to the methods already attributed to the Junto during 1707-8, using the strength of the Tories to serve their own interests. The only difference is that now it is being done to reinforce the court's interest, against that of the Whigs outside government. Defoe uses exactly the same pretext for the ministry's recourse to an unholy alliance, as he has, less sympathetically, for the Junto's:

The Power of Parties being unhappily grown too great to be at first wholly neglected, it is ... with a design wholly to throw them off at last, as a Man leaves off his Cloaths by degrees as the Summer advances, and the heat of the Season brings him out of danger of taking cold.⁶⁴

While the Junto's use of the Tories three years ago is presented as an exotic spectacle, one of the '*Phenomena*' of party politics, Harley's ministry is seen as simply facing up to the conditions in which it must hold onto power. Defoe does balance this with concern at the possibility that they might fail, but this only draws attention to the audacity of the manoeuvre and the prestige in carrying it off.

In the second section of the pamphlet, Defoe recalls in his most exultant manner yet the ministry-to-be's management of the high-fliers after the Sacheverell trial, which eventually brought about a radical reshuffle of the government. The imagery deployed in these excerpts is particularly noteworthy:

To wheedle them into this, for they knew they were easily to be caught, they baited their Hook with a roasted Priest, set him to cry Fire, and raise the whole Nation

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 28, 29.

into a Flame; immediately the bubbled Party bit at the Bait, and away they run with it, without so much as feeling that the Hook hung in their Mouths.

The cunning Anglers play'd with them as you do with a Trout; let them run on, let them raise Mobs, Tumults ... and in short, put the whole Nation into a Flame.

Sometimes they would draw their line a little, and bring them nearer hand, and almost to their Net, putting several Mortifications upon them, with fine Speeches, Addresses to STAND-BY, &c ... These things went against the Grain, and touching them to the quick, away the Party would fling, and flounce, and be in a rage, like a Lunatick. *Well*, then the State Anglers would try to tickle them with a Feather, *still as you do a Trout*; give them a Sugar-plumb word or two.

This pleases them again, and they come to hand for a purpose, but it lasts but for a while; when feeling the Hook prick them a little, and the very thought of Moderation putting them into a fright, they take a run again, and away they go, carrying all before them; the cunning Workmen *let them go*, run out the line ...

After this they begin to draw them to hand again; and with many a lusty promise, they brought these furious People to be something tame, to come into Management, and to be true Auxiliaries. Many a Sugar-plumb was they fain to give them; many an Opiate to doze and delude them.⁶⁵

Although Defoe resists the temptation to focus on Harley alone here, this unrestrained, colourful depiction of political management is unprecedented in his propaganda. The passage abounds in images of fishing and hunting, hinting at an almost wanton manipulation of these impressionable opponents. Little attention is given to any public-spirited end which Defoe might claim that this conduct is serving.

It is interesting that in one of the key works of Harleian propaganda, *An Account of a Dream at Harwich*, very similar imagery had been used to suggest the Godolphin ministry's hold on Parliament, and its evasion of accountability. The vision shows a crowd of people with their fingers in their ears, and their eyes almost closed, unable to raise any objection to the confusion and discontent which surrounds them. If any of the crowd tried to rouse themselves from this lethargy,

there were a sort of Fellows among them with great Bags of Sugar-Plums; and if one of them did but open an Eye, or lift a Finger from an Ear, one of these

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 45-8.

presently pop'd a Sugar-Plum in his Mouth, and he sprung immediately into his old Posture.⁶⁶

This tract is permeated with the imagery of stupefaction and enchantment. Defoe suggests that the new ministers, who would supplant Godolphin and his colleagues, contrived this change by similarly tranquilizing the High Tories into the belief that the next ministry would be of their complexion, utilizing Tory zeal to their own ends. It is a prime example of how Defoe's defences of the Harley ministry could conform alarmingly to Country satires against entrenched, corrupt governments.

He attempts to dismiss fears that the high-fliers have had some influence on the direction of the ministry. But he can only do so in language that draws further attention to the ministry's wiliness:

But when they saw the Wheel within the Wheel, when they saw the Scheme Work, and that the Engineers of the State Gradually and Wisely dropt all their first appearances, and acted upon the same Revolution Foundation that others had done before, then all those Fears vanish'd at once.⁶⁷

It is a measure of the freedom which Defoe now feels as a propagandist, that he can openly apply his favourite metaphor for surreptitious manipulation, once confined to his private letters, to the ministry whom he is defending.

Oxford's popular esteem was short-lived, as he soon became the focus for the controversy that began to rage around the rumoured peace negotiations with France. Defoe's polemical talent was to be harnessed to the defence of peace as a general objective, the Treaty of Utrecht itself, and more particularly its subsidiary Treaty of Commerce, for practically the remainder of Queen Anne's reign. This left few opportunities for promulgating his pet notion of Oxford flawlessly turning troublesome High Tory factions to the ministry's advantage. Given Oxford's increasingly precarious

⁶⁶ *An Account of a Dream at Harwich* (London: B. Bragg, 1708), p. 5. The tract is discussed in Downie, pp. 106-12.

⁶⁷ *The Secret History of the October Club*, part I, p. 56.

hold on power, besieged on the one hand by Tory rivals led by Bolingbroke, and on the other, by the Whigs resentful of the peace deal, any such celebration of his authority might have seemed in poor taste.

But Defoe did occasionally find space in the *Review*, particularly during 1712, for reflections on Oxford's position. Here his view is, perhaps deliberately, more ambiguous than in the pamphlets of the previous year. At times he almost takes a perverse pleasure in the decline of his earlier ambitions for Oxford. The minister is still the centre of party attention, but instead of being the fulcrum for political stability, as each faction is rendered dependent upon his survival, he is the hub of party conflict.

Both Reproach the Person they aim at, with the same Thing -- *Whigs* Reproach him with *going over to the Tories*, and then join in with *Jacobites* themselves to over-match him; the *October-Men* Revile him with *acting* upon damn'd *Whiggish Principles*, and then themselves fall in with the *Whigs* to reduce him.

Even though Defoe is admitting Oxford's failure to stanch political divisions, he seems to betray a fascination with the way all sides are converging on this particular individual.

Later that year, he expresses a certain weariness at the timeless technique of turning opponents into tools, recalling how the Oxford ministry have been obliged to treat with Tories:

This drove the whole Ministry to make use of all the Hands that could be had, and (having the Practice of the good People beforemention'd, too plainly laid down for their Example) to lay hold of *Jacobite* Party at Home, *French Interest* Abroad, or any that might be had; as a Man when his House is on Fire, Examines not on what Principle any Man acts, so be it he will help to put out the Flame ... *Wretched England!* To what dreadful Extremity art thou brought! -- That every Party will Embrace thine Enemies, rather than not carry on their private Ends!

In the past Defoe has been keen to draw attention to the singularity of the ministry's manoeuvres. But here they are seen as merely following the bad example of their predecessors. Their recourse to Tory support is almost mundanely inevitable. There is a tone of near-impartiality here, which is no doubt contrived, but does perhaps reflect Defoe's worries about the growing rumours that the ministry was in contact with the

Pretender. This mood is carried into the following issue, where Defoe remarks on the claim that the ministry 'join'd with their [the Jacobites'] Interest, but not with the same Principle': '*I believe it* in the first, and *I hope it* in the second, and there lies the present Dispute'.⁶⁸ The illusion of solidarity towards each faction had once been seen by Defoe as a miraculous means of quelling party divisions; now it is viewed as a necessary evil.

However, Defoe still celebrates Oxford's personal accomplishments as manager. Oxford may only be resorting to time-honoured practices, but he consummates them with a rare panache. If this approach undermines any idea of Oxford's moral superiority to his rivals, it nevertheless still permits Defoe to enjoy describing Oxford's more cultured sleight of hand. Where the Godolphin ministry fails in its use of tools, Oxford seizes his opportunity to replace them and succeed with ease at the same methods:

The vigilant Eye of the Great Person, who was now become the Head of the Outed Party, was not capable of overlooking such an opportunity -- But taking his Measures warily, securely, yet swiftly, he strook the great Blow, effected what the other had fail'd in, and Overthrew them all at once.

Defoe goes on to praise

the Skill with which the great Person I am speaking of Defended himself, how he warded every Blow, how he succeeded in every Step, and how he preserv'd his Schemes untouch'd in every Part, I need not recount.

Among the notable highlights of his office, there has been his preservation of public credit with the assistance of the very City Whigs who had hoped to make it dependent upon themselves:

For having laid the Funds in Parliament, with but the Trifling Advantage of hardly one *per Cent.* more than usual, *a Bait hardly able to cover the Hook*, they crowded in that Money upon him, faster than he could receive it.

Even the creation of twelve peers to prevent the passage of the Occasional Conformity Bill through the Lords is conceived as an inspired manoeuvre:

⁶⁸ *Review*, VIII, 490b; [IX], 30b, 32a, 32a.

To counter-act this killing Stroke, the prime Minister had recourse to the Queen, as by Law her Majesty might do, to make more Votes, and thereby Overthrew that Attempt, and gain'd a Majority.⁶⁹

This is certainly the most candid defence of Oxford's ingenuity that Defoe ever mounted in the *Review*. Like the historical protagonists of the memoirs and lives which Defoe had absorbed, Oxford consolidates power by outmanoeuvring his opponents.

This interpretation of Oxford's career, as a sequence of spectacular political stunts whose audacity and infallibility can be evoked and evaluated for the reader's entertainment, along with Defoe's more fatalistic view of his decline, were to form the basis of his next work about Oxford: *The Secret History of the White Staff*. It was in a sense the work which he had been waiting to write since 1704. But ironically, or perhaps inevitably, it could not be written until after Oxford had actually fallen from power.

⁶⁹ *Review*, [IX], 29a-b, 29b-30a, 30a, 30b.

CHAPTER THREE

**Defoe and Harley (II):
*the Machiavel of Penmenmaur.***

I should not have troubled my self so much about their *Characters*, was not my Historian setting them off as so many *Machiavels*.

[John Oldmixon], *A Detection of the Sophistry and Falsities of The Secret History of the White Staff*, Part III.¹

Oxford resigned as Lord High Treasurer on 27 July 1714; five days later Queen Anne died. It was as apparent to Defoe's contemporaries as it has been to later historians that these events marked the end of an era in British politics. As the exhausted Tory administration was replaced by the Whig Council of Regents and the accession of George I was anticipated, a vast amount of print was expended in rehearsing and scrutinizing the events of the previous four years. Oxford, along with Bolingbroke and Ormonde, was expected to face a show-trial for treason against the Protestant succession. His political reputation was to be a moot issue for the next three years.

1714 was also a watershed in Defoe's gradual and subtle development from political propagandist to novelist. He seized this opportunity to reinterpret and embellish Oxford's career so readily that he scarcely allowed it to pass into history. Although Defoe eventually found employment with the new administration, he would never again be as closely engaged with day-to-day politics and as attached to one particular minister, as he had been during Queen Anne's reign. After 1714, Defoe began to devote as much effort to reviving the events and characters of this period in the light of his own preoccupations, as to taking a stand on current affairs. The Oxford who appears in these retrospective accounts owes as much to Defoe's Machiavellian reveries as to the real Oxford, whose flaws were only too apparent to many of his contemporaries during the last few years of

¹ (London: J. Roberts, 1715), p. 7.

his premiership. Just as Richelieu and Mazarin were eventually transformed into characters in popular literature, Oxford at times seems to become the prototype for Defoe's later fictional creations.

The Secret History of the White Staff was Defoe's first major response to the change in Oxford's circumstances. The work has only recently received the attention which it deserves, and even now commentators tend to paraphrase the texts and pass over the many contemporary replies to the pamphlets.² In fact, every aspect of the affair, from the work's origins to its widespread notoriety, yields insights into Defoe's character and work.

The *White Staff* was far from being an immediate reaction to events: it emerged from several months of irresolution. Defoe was anticipating a defence of Oxford even before his resignation. He wrote to the minister on 26 July 1714 'to Repeat my assurances of my following your Worst Fortunes, and of being, fall it foul or fair, your Constant, faithfull and Steddy as Well as Humble and Obedt Servt'. But the Queen's unexpected death created a turbulent political climate in which Defoe felt uncertain how best to serve his patron. Two days afterwards, on 3 August, he claimed that he had withdrawn an already completed defence of Oxford, to take stock of events.

The Surprissing Turn given by The Imediate hand of Providence to the State of things Since my Last has been the Reason why I have not Persued what I was upon for Vindicateing your Ldpps person and Conduct and Exposeing your Enemyes as I had proposed to your Ldpp and which was actually in the Press and part of it Printed off.

Three weeks later, he seemed more unsure still about what tone to adopt in such an unforgiving and pugnacious political climate.

² For recent discussions of the work, see Backscheider, pp. 353-6; Downie, pp. 186-8; Furbank and Owens, *The Canonisation of Daniel Defoe*, pp. 167-9; Geoffrey Sill, *Defoe and the Idea of Fiction 1713-1719* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1983), pp. 87-93; briefer discussions are included in Downie, "'Mistakes On All Sides': A New Defoe Manuscript," *Review of English Studies* (N.S.), 27 (1976), 431-7; Furbank and Owens, 'The Lost Property Office: Some Defoe Attributions Reconsidered', *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 86 (1992), 245-67.

Indeed my Lord, the juncture has been So Nice I hardly could Tell which way to direct words So to Suit the Fluctuating Tempers of the people, as Not to do harm instead of Good; If I press'd Moderation and a Return to Charity and Temper, Our Outrageous people presently call it fear of punishmt and The Law, and They begin to be calling for Fire from Heaven already Not knowing what Spirit they are of.³

The obvious strategy would be to celebrate Oxford as a moderate, but the times seemed to demand a more vigorous, uncompromising approach. A further quarrel within Defoe is perhaps discernible in these letters: that between his sense of what will work most effectively as propaganda in Oxford's interest, and his urge to become as much popular historiographer as propagandist, depicting Oxford's character and career with a certain amount of poetic licence.

For the moment, Defoe compromised by planning a series of progressively more detailed and thoroughgoing apologies for the Oxford ministry.

In this difficulty My Lord I find the way to Talk with them is by Little and Little, gaining upon their Furious Tempers by Inches. This therefore is but an Introduction and Speaks all upon Generalls, and will be followed with Another and Another as things present; and as the Distinction between your Ldpps administration and That which would have follow'd is absolutely Necessary, My Next will state That part more Clearly Than any thing Seems to have done yet, I mean within the Reach of Common Observation.

A clear distinction is made between the enclosed 'Introduction' and what he promises as 'My Next'. The latter will be rather more combative and outspoken. This is why the assumption of George Healey, the editor of Defoe's letters, that Defoe was enclosing the first part of the *White Staff* and anticipating its two sequels will not do.⁴ It also begs the question of why part I was not published until the beginning of October, if it was submitted to Oxford as early as 26 August.

³ *Letters*, pp. 443, 444, 444-5.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 445.

J.A. Downie has discovered among Oxford's papers a much more likely candidate for the 'Introduction': an unfinished manuscript in Defoe's handwriting, entitled 'Mistakes On All Sides', which appears to date from August 1714. It is on its own admission an 'Introduction' to a larger work. It tallies with Defoe's description of a conciliatory pamphlet too, as it claims to be 'of No ... Side ... Address'd to No Party', and expects to bring upon the author 'ye Reproachfull Name of a Trimmer'. It does prefigure the first *White Staff* pamphlet in stressing that the work will focus on a few individuals.

There are but very Few who have Ever been Concern'd in State Affairs but what shall be able here to find Some of Their Errors, and Some May Read their Characters without Their Names, in wch: They Will if They are Ingenuous Acknowledge They are us'd with More Civillity Than They Deserve.⁵

But the *White Staff* was to be an altogether more partial and presumptuous account of events than is suggested either here or in the letter. Assuming that 'Mistakes on All Sides' is the enclosed manuscript, Defoe seems to have been slowly edging towards such a dramatization of the events of the previous four years.

But unforeseen circumstances intervened. Defoe was held responsible for a letter which had appeared in the *Flying Post* (not George Ridpath's Whig journal, but a short-lived rival of the same name), insinuating that the Earl of Anglesey, one of the Council of Regents, was a Jacobite. He was arrested on 28 August and his prosecution for seditious libel was authorized. There followed a long period of bail from 7 September until July 1715. Defoe's last two letters to Oxford, of 31 August and 28 September are given over entirely to desperate pleas for his assistance in the case. But the scandal effectively ended Defoe's long association with Oxford, while the former minister was no doubt more concerned with his own immediate future. As Paula Backscheider has pointed out, Oxford was unlikely to be sympathetic to Defoe's requests, as the prosecution was being led by

⁵ Downie, "'Mistakes On All Sides'", pp. 436-7.

the Secretary of State William Bromley, one of his few remaining allies in a position of influence.⁶

The repercussions of the Anglesey affair to some extent helped Defoe resolve his difficulties over how to vindicate Oxford. After his release from custody on 7 September, his duty to produce a reliable, well-modulated account of the Oxford ministry seems to have issued in the tract *Advice to the People of Great Britain*, while his private ambition to construct a more fanciful secret history materialized in the first *White Staff* pamphlet. Both works were published in early October. Most significantly, the apparent cooling of his relationship with Oxford, as a result of the Anglesey episode, meant that he undertook their composition without reference to their intended beneficiary. Defoe's final letter to Oxford was written perhaps only days before the publication of the first *White Staff* pamphlet, but he encloses only a manuscript, perhaps damaging to Oxford, whose publication in *Dyer's News-letter* he has managed to thwart. No mention is made of any new composition of his own.⁷

This has little bearing on *Advice*. It is a relatively standard, inoffensive defence, lamenting the absence of 'PUBLIC PEACE' and excusing the former ministry's employment of high-fliers as the only possible response to the intransigence of its enemies. Oxford is singled out as the main obstacle to Jacobite designs:

the Person who possess'd the Power of Prime Minister, having views quite different from theirs, and which they were indeed penetrating enough to see would at least overthrow them.⁸

But this is as far as the character sketch goes. The overwhelming assumption is that Oxford had surrendered the administration of affairs to a faction within the ministry long

⁶ Backscheider, pp. 378-82.

⁷ See *Letters*, pp. 447-8.

⁸ *Advice to the People of Great Britain* (London: J. Baker, 1714), pp. 3-4, 9. For a discussion of the tract, see Backscheider, pp. 351-3.

before his resignation. However, the *White Staff* pamphlets are a different case. The knowledge that Defoe wrote them behind Oxford's back sheds much light on their character. Defoe's readiness to give full play to his persistent fantasies about Oxford as political operator seems to have grown in proportion to his personal detachment from the man.

The secret history was an established popular genre in England by 1714; readers would have approached any new offering in this vein with a particular set of expectations. Its origins lay in the French 'scandal chronicles' of the late seventeenth century, which drew upon an older literary tradition of sexual gossip about the aristocracy, and added satire on contemporary politics. By the 1700s, Delarivier Manley had begun adapting the genre to current English politics, so that the secret history soon joined the repertoire of English political propaganda.

During Queen Anne's reign, the genre would have been defined above all by Manley's popular success of 1709, *The New Atalantis*. Like much of her work, it offers a mishmash of autobiography and political or amatory gossip dignified by allegory. Its political motive is to discredit the present ministry, dominated by Godolphin and Marlborough (and, it implies, the Duchess of Marlborough), to the advantage of Harley, who had been ousted the year before. The intertwining of sexual and political intrigue creates an overwhelming impression of an introverted, self-serving oligarchy. In this context, the rapt Machiavellian appraisal of political intrigue is invariably ironic and intended to evoke sleaze. Consider these reflections on how Godolphin during the 1690s turned his potentially destructive passion for the Duchess of Marlborough to his own gain:

But as great genius's have this peculiar that, when they are in misfortunes and meet unlucky accidents, they have address, not only to extricate themselves, but to make those very misfortunes conducive to the advantage that those accidents seem to obstruct, so Count Biron foresaw that this passion which he so ragingly felt for Madam de Caria, by her ascendant in the Lady Olympia's [the future Queen Anne's] favour, might be brought to introduce and fix him there, an advantage he

had then but little prospect of, I mean, a rational one because he was in the interests and designs of the Princess Ormia [James II].

He uses the liaison to ingratiate himself with a likely successor to the throne, while maintaining his conspicuous loyalty to the present monarch. 'So was his retreat secured, and which way soever the die cast, himself in election to draw a prize'.⁹ It is essentially the sort of foolproof scheme which Defoe would also offer as a feat of cunning, though with much less irony.

Harley is also represented in *The New Atalantis*, predictably serving as a disinterested foil to the unscrupulous Godolphin. The two ministers share a proficiency in politics, but the ends which they pursue are quite disparate. In Manley's Tory vision, Harley assumes that government is as much the Queen's responsibility as that of her ministers.

Don Haro would listen to all she said with that pleasing approbation, humbly offering his opinion if in any point disagreeing from the Princess's, that she soon found the difference of an arbitrary, self-sufficient minister and that of a modest, distinguishing man, conscious of her capacity who, as she said, was the only one would vouchsafe to hear her.

Don Haro is almost the obverse of Defoe's 1704 vision of Harley as prime minister. There, the Queen had only appeared as a figurehead, to be piously acknowledged, but actually exploited as a screen behind which cabinet government might be introduced. Manley's rather unctuous Harley even warns the Queen that Godolphin is planning just such underhand innovations:

Don Haro made Olympia observe the ambition of the Count, how the monarchy was in effect reduced to an oligarchy, a council of six, sitting in Biron's cabinet upon the life and death of the nation, pursuing the interests of it no longer than it agreed with their own, unalterably true to that in their practice, though not in their pretence. The few who in reality governed and left her only the appearance were

⁹ Delarivier Manley, *The New Atalantis* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1992), pp. 193, 194.

all men of a profound distinction and who it was thought ambitioned to have that form of government obtain in use with their neighbours the Venetians.¹⁰

Defoe's private vision of Harley coincidentally resembles Manley's satire on ministerial corruption.

The New Atalantis set the pattern for other lesser known secret histories of the period. Any work within the genre would have been expected to set off the sordid opportunism of certain politicians, evoked in language drawn from the Machiavellian lexicon, against the public-spirited decency of those in whose interests the tract was written. *The Secret History of Arlus and Odolphus* is a Tory assault on the careerism of Godolphin and the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough ('Fortunatus', as in *The New Atalantis*, and 'Hautisara'). It claims to expose 'the Labour'd Artifices' through which they manoeuvred the Queen into removing the loyal Harley. A clear division is established between Harley's political perspicacity and the others' self-interested designs. The attempts of Odolphus and Fortunatus to cancel out Harley's threat to their ambitions are raised ironically into artful contrivances. For example, the scandal surrounding the trial of the clerk from Harley's office, William Gregg, for corresponding with France, is compressed into a devious plot against Harley:

The Treasonable Practices of a Clerk in *Arlus's* Office have made his Story too Publick to need a particular Recital; but the consummate Artifices us'd to involve *Arlus* himself in the capital Infamy of being the Accomplice of his Guilt, deserve a Monumental Record to the harden'd Memory of the Under-takers.

Only Providence's intervention, in the form of Gregg's unpredictable testimony to his employer's innocence, thwarts their plans. In contrast, Arlus appears as a tragic but dignified casualty of modern politics:

Thus these Jealous, Overbearing Men tore from their Sovereign's Sight, the most Faithfull, Vigilant, Disinterested, and (if it be Wisdom to deserve those Epithets) I may say, Wisest of her Ministers.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 206, 207.

Arlus (who yet was unacquainted with the Modern way of working up Tools, or Knaves, to Insult their Sovereign with sawcy Remonstrances, upon her removing a Minister) receiv'd without a Murmur his Disgrace.¹¹

Largely because of Manley's influence, in identifying the genre with Tory satire against the Godolphin-Marlborough 'Family', Harley emerges rather well from most secret histories during Queen Anne's reign.

But there was a Whig rendition in *The History of Prince Mirabel's Infancy, Rise and Disgrace*, a thorough defence of Marlborough, albeit with mock-heroic undertones. The work departs from Manley's format to some extent, in readily echoing her account of Marlborough's sexual escapades in the permissive setting of the Restoration court, but intending these passages as a compliment to the statesman's grandeur and virility rather than as evidence of political decadence. But it conforms to the general rule of attaching Machiavellian terms to its chosen enemies, here Harley ('Novicius') and his allies, to distinguish them from its disinterested hero. Consider this description of 'Talbozio' (Shrewsbury), recalled from exile in Italy by Harley:

He was a Politico that perfectly understood all the Arts that are put in Practice by the most Refin'd Statesmen; had a *Matchivillian* Head, and a Heart that would give Admission to downright Contrarieties: Turn him which way you would he was still in Disguise, and known truly to no Man breathing but *Novicius*, whose Principles were of the same Stamp.¹²

In secret histories, these characteristics and labels are the grist to an attack on politicians who are judged to be scheming and untrustworthy.

¹¹ *The Secret History of Arlus and Odolphus*, part I (London, 1710), Title-page, pp. 27-8, 26-7. The *ESTC* notices that the tract is attributed, perhaps erroneously, to 'Mr. Cibber' in the list of 'Books printed for Bernard Lintot' at the end of Thomas Parnell's *Poems On Several Occasions* (London: Bernard Lintot, 1726). It was subsequently attacked in *The Impartial Secret History of Arlus, Fortunatus, and Odolphus* (London, 1710).

¹² *The History of Prince Mirabel's Infancy, Rise and Disgrace*, 3 parts (London: J. Baker, 1712), II, 59. The tract is briefly discussed in John Richetti, *Popular Fiction Before Richardson* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), pp. 140-2.

One episode in particular illustrates the kind of conduct which a reader would expect from the main target of such a tract. Mirabel has returned from a triumphant military campaign, only to be greeted with criticism from some of the Lords, led by 'Rossenio' and 'Luteolo'. Novicius then manages both to enlist them in his interest, despite their better inclinations, and still to take part in discussions with Mirabel and 'Delphino' (Godolphin) about how to thwart the Lords' designs.

However, he so play'd his Game, that even these two Noblemen were brought over to his Side, without knowing themselves to have any concern with him; on the contrary, rather believing they were engag'd in a Contrivance that would terminate with his Overthrow, as well as that of the other Ministers. Thus were they insensibly drawn in to promote the Interest of a Man who was in the highest Detestation with them, while he seemingly was a Declar'd Enemy to all further Changes, and profess'd the most Inviolable Friendship and Affection to the present Settlement. Not a Day pass'd during *Mirabel's* stay at the Court of *Britomartia*, but he held Consultations with him and *Delphino* about defeating the Parties Designs, that he himself had form'd in opposition to them; not a Night darken'd the Hemisphere, but he and *Arcurio* [Harcourt] and *Henrico* [Bolingbroke] met at *Montiana's* Apartment in the *Palatio*, to confer Notes together, in order to untwist the Schemes he had been just before Forming with the other. So that here was *Penelope's* Labour to a Tittle, and what was Wrought in the Day, was again Unwoven in the Night.

Novicius is defined by the capacity to convince two opposing sides that he is a reliable ally; by exactly the kind of adaptability which Defoe had initially offered to Harley as an attainable ideal.

Novicius was to appear what he really was, in *Arcurio's* Description, and to be made a Favourer of all Sects and Opinions, to Advance the Project he was Engag'd in; while he himself was to make a Discovery, at every Meeting, of what had pass'd between *Mirabel*, *Delphino*, and Him, for their mutual Security, in order to their being prepar'd to make Counter Steps against it.

Novicius works a series of political miracles that promise to leave him securely entrenched in government. He turns Gregg, 'that very Under Agent they design'd to confront him with', into the very means of eluding the charge of treason. After he has been dismissed, he 'thought fit to play the *Sacristo*' to re-establish himself in power, fomenting popular

suspicion of the ministry's prosecution of 'Aerifacio' (Sacheverell).¹³ But although the work lays such inventive artifices at the door of its intended targets, it avoids any ambivalence. Machiavellian characteristics are consistently bestowed upon Novicius, Montiana and Talbozio; never upon Mirabel and Delphino.

Defoe had naturally been attracted to the secret history at an early stage. The genre allowed him to indulge his fascination with backstairs politics and its familiar terminology. But this motive was highly dangerous in Defoe's case. While secret histories often seemed to derive a voyeuristic thrill from delineating sexual and political machinations, these passages were always intended to suggest a backdrop of sleaze and chicanery to the exploits of its main targets. Defoe, as I have been arguing, was too genuinely attracted to the ornate political contrivance to identify it solely with his opponents. In *The Consolidator*, his first attempt at a secret history, he had seemed occasionally to appraise the manoeuvres of Tories and Dissenters without regard to his own political allegiances, blurring the cut and dried distinctions expected from such a work. *The Secret History of the October Club* strayed even further from the genre claimed by its title, its first part evolving from a general discussion of unholy alliances into an extravagant appreciation of the ministry's flamboyant manipulation of the Club.

Defoe seems not to have entirely understood the conventions of the English secret history: that it was most effective at insinuating the corruption of certain politicians, particularly those in government, rather than as a means of defence or eulogy. He perhaps identified it with a different, though cognate, French popular genre of the late seventeenth century: the lives and testaments of the leading French statesmen of that century, which were generally less ironic and satirical than the scandal chronicles. For Defoe to resort to the secret history as the vehicle for vindicating a recent minister, who was anticipating trial for treason, was reckless to say the least.

¹³ *The History of Prince Mirabel's Infancy, Rise and Disgrace*, II, 48, 50, 77; III, 38.

Part I of *The Secret History of the White Staff* was published in early October 1714, and was closely followed by part II on 27 October. After a considerable critical backlash, to which Defoe may have made his own veiled contribution (of which more later), part III appeared on 29 January 1715.¹⁴ Although the final part shows some signs of modification after the gibes which had greeted its predecessors, the three parts are still best discussed together.

If Defoe did write *Advice To The People Of Great Britain* for publication in early October, it suggests that he discharged his debt to Oxford in a reliable tract, so that he could then devote himself to a more imaginative secret history, less constrained by the demands of propaganda. But something of the indecision which he had admitted in his letters of July-August persists even in the *White Staff*. The tracts fail as propaganda, because they vacillate between two ideas of Oxford: the loyal, disinterested, but unsuccessful public servant, who is eventually subsumed in the ebb and flow of party politics; and the virtuoso political manager, whose prodigious contrivances leave himself and the ministry invulnerable. The very measures which one moment are being seen as the source of his downfall are next cried up as a spectacular success.

Parts I and II both begin by setting the fate of the Oxford ministry in a wider historical context. Defoe seems to have decided initially that he could best defend Oxford by portraying him as a victim of time-honoured political practices. Part I offers two precedents for the device of gaining access to power via an eminent figure, only to supplant them at a later stage. Thomas Becket became a thorn in the side of the King who had once promoted him; and Richelieu displaced his original benefactress Mary de Medici. It is implied that the Oxford ministry's loss of power to Tories and Jacobites, whom they

¹⁴ For a chronological checklist of all the tracts from 1714-17 concerned with the Oxford ministry that have been attributed to Defoe, see Furbank and Owens, 'The Lost Property Office', pp. 249-55.

had brought into the administration as a temporary expedient, is simply the latest variation on this scenario. The ministry's intended policies

have been overturn'd by the Agency of those Instruments who acting with different Views from those under whose Conduct, and by whose Authority, they were introduc'd; have set up Schemes of their own, and thereby not only supplanted those who they acted under, but gone far in throwing this poor Nation in to such Confusion, as might have been fatal to the publick Peace. (*WS*, I, 5-6)

It is the kind of manoeuvre which had long appealed to Defoe: the high-fliers are the wheels within the wheels of the ministry's designs, apparently serving their ends but actually wresting government from them. This approach risks admitting that the ministry accomodated professed Jacobites, but this can be excused by the demands of party politics. The ministry can at least appear to be without responsibility for the more extreme policies adopted in its name.

Part II similarly expatiates on 'that old Maxim of Politicks, That *Men might be made use of when they can serve us, without any real Design to serve them*' (*WS*, II, 5-6).

A number of examples are adduced, ranging from Charles I's acceptance of help from Catholics during the civil war, to the exotic alliance against the ministry during the 1708 election in Scotland, comprising Junto and Squadrone Whigs, and assorted High Tories and Jacobites. Defoe suggests with apparent neutrality that both Oxford and the Jacobites were following this hardy political custom:

so that the *Jacobites* coming in with the *Staff*, was the Consequence of the Nature of their Circumstances at that Time, as the *Staff* receiving them, and making use of them, was the Consequence of his. (*WS*, II, 10)

By generalizing about the practices which surround the ministry's disgrace, Defoe dispels the view that they are a special case, an example of egregious corruption. They were only resorting to methods that have been tried across the political spectrum since at least the last century.

Part III also represents the ministry's conduct as just the latest instance of a timeless recourse. But although Defoe continues to discuss the Oxford ministry's example

with a historian's detachment, he is less impartial towards the practice itself; probably in response to the way opponents had construed the two earlier parts as glorifying the ministry's dealings with Jacobites. No distinction is made between the ministry and those whom it had supplanted in government. They are equal competitors in the Hobbesian political arena:

It is evident, that the *Rage of Parties* ... ran to so fearful an Extreme, that neither Side could be said to stick at any thing to offend, or to defend; both set aside the known Christian Rule, not to do Evil that Good might come, legitimating their usual Extravagancies, by the pretended Necessity which they were said to be in, to pull each other down, or to defend themselves. (*WS*, III, 20-1)

There is greater exasperation at modern political mores than before and an insistence that these remedies are always self-defeating. Defoe now points out that Charles I's efforts to boost his forces with Catholics were a failure. He is unconvinced by the view that the end excuses the means, claiming that this tract will offer 'no defence for the taking by the Hand a Jacobite Party, and caressing too much the Enemies of the Constitution, however justifiable it might be' (*WS*, III, 21). But this more critical tone only serves to divert the reader from the way in which such a sweeping discussion of orthodox political practice exculpates this particular ministry.

Part of Defoe's strategy in these sections of the pamphlets is to avoid suggesting that there is anything exceptional about the behaviour or fate of the last ministry, and clearly this demands that little emphasis is placed upon Oxford as an individual. According to this approach, if the minister does appear, it should be as an irreproachable public servant, though one who was fighting a losing battle against party divisions. Towards the end of part I, Oxford pledges loyalty to the Hanoverian Succession in his resignation speech before the Queen, and addresses a smug lecture on public-spirited government to the high-flying faction to whom he has by now fallen prey (*WS*, I, 58-61). The conclusion of part II similarly lays stress on the ministry's deference to the Queen, but avoids attributing this characteristic to Oxford alone (*WS*, II, 69-70).

Part III, in keeping with its more hard-headed approach, ends with the impression of Oxford as a principled, well-intentioned minister, whose attempt to establish a non-party government resulted only in mistrust on all sides:

Moderate Councils were those the STAFF purpos'd to establish, that he might have kept a Balance between two furious Parties; the Artifice which he us'd to bring those to an Equality, is the Reason that these Men charge him with Cunning and Tricking; and that, as they say, he deceiv'd every Body; the Truth of which is no more than this, That he endeavour'd to bring both Sides to submit to Reason, and to suffer themselves to be governed by the Measures which he propos'd, would preserve the Constitution, and yet leave the Queen to govern; neither Side could bear this. (*WS*, III, 76-7)

Defoe goes on to suggest that Oxford's 'endeavouring to serve himself of every body, without rewarding' was an additional factor (*WS*, III, 80). As elsewhere in part III, Defoe's apparent objectivity still works in Oxford's favour, by reminding that over a long period he was losing out to factions inside and outside the ministry, and therefore cannot be held responsible for all its actions. Defoe claims, as he had done in *Advice to the People of Great Britain*, that 'the Authority in Acting, and particular Cognizance of Things before they were acted, was never so entirely given up to the Ministry as has been pretended' (*WS*, II, 70). This is the thrust of many passages in the pamphlets. If the *White Staff* had consistently maintained this strategy, it would perhaps have been a quietly effective piece of propaganda on Oxford's behalf; or, as Geoffrey Sill has seen it, 'a dramatic poem in prose about a faithful servant who had been ensnared by the designs of his enemies and the ambitions of his false friends'.¹⁵ But Defoe had other motives in writing the pamphlets, which ensured that they never achieved such consistency.

Emboldened by the fictional ambience of the secret history, Defoe also saw the work as an opportunity for portraying Oxford as Machiavellian hero. At times in each of the pamphlets, Oxford is assigned a privileged role as a manager of factions and negotiator

¹⁵ Sill, p. 87.

of obstacles. Here, government is viewed as largely the responsibility of an individual minister:

The *Staff*, who was always of the Opinion, that who ever had the Reins of the *Administration*, was able to preserve an equilibrium or ballance of Parties, and to govern, manage and direct them all with a due Subserviency to the Royal Authority; that he might be carrying a stiff Rein here, and a slack Rein there, as occasion offered; either check, or encourage; restrain, or give room on every side, as the Temper, Strength and Measures of every Party called for it; and that having an entire Possession of the Execution, Authority was all that was needful to a *Minister of State*. (*WS*, III, 23-4)

Such a view clearly gravitates against Defoe's efforts to convince the reader that Oxford, for all his high principles and good intentions, held little sway over the ministry from an early stage. But this is still a relatively respectable interpretation of the minister's function, at pains to stress that his management is subject to the royal prerogative.

Elsewhere in the pamphlets, Defoe offers a more outré depiction of Oxford as manager. Scattered through all three parts are a number of passages in which Oxford is the star turn, affording a dazzling exhibition of political finesse, apparently as much for posterity's amusement as his own immediate needs. These passages disrupt Defoe's initial argument. They go much further than attempting to base a defence 'on the known weaknesses of Harley's character, his deviousness, indolence, etc.', as P.N. Furbank and W.R. Owens have suggested.¹⁶ They extol his gift for evasion and manipulation in a manner that would have unmistakably recalled popular Machiavellian literature for its readers. For example, in part I, Oxford's attempts to ward off the threats of the Whig opposition are dramatized memorably:

The *White-Staff* however kept its Station, and the Policy and Management of the Prime Minister defeated all the Attempts which the displac'd Party had made, or saw room to make, to break in upon him; in every Attack they were repuls'd; in every Battle he had the Victory; and albeit they never fail'd to renew their Assaults, yet they found him so well fortify'd in every Part, that many began to see their

¹⁶ Furbank and Owens, 'The Lost Property Office', p. 256.

Mistake, and to own they had better to have accomodated things at first; that they never thought they could have maintain'd himself in such a manner as they found; and that no Head but his could have extricated it self out of such Labyrinths, escap'd so many Snares, and brought himself out of so many Difficulties, as he had done. (*WS*, I, 14-15)

It is as if Defoe feels that the 'White-Staff' sobriquet sanctions the attribution of favourite political techniques to Oxford. The minister alone forestalls every attempt to undermine his position, to the point where he seems to have transcended the usual fluctuation of political fortunes. Even when he is brought to a crisis, he displays an unrivalled talent for political escapology.

Defoe's analysis of these feats is hyperbolic and defiantly abstract; he makes little attempt to flesh out these claims with specific detail. He is more interested in certain patterns of manipulation:

The very Things which they thought to have overthrown him most effectually by, they found themselves obliged to turn to his Advantage; and he received the Thanks even of some of their own Friends, in those Parts of his Administration which they thought were most open to their Censure. (*WS*, I, 15)

Momentarily, the idea of Oxford transmuting the sources of greatest danger to his interest into its very buttresses is of more concern than the actual issues around which these manoeuvres occur. Only after Defoe has completed this appraisal, undisturbed by fact, does he cite proof of Oxford's resistance of the Whigs: his refutation of the charge that he had abandoned the Catalans to the King of Spain, and that he had condoned Jacobitism by granting pensions to Highland clans. But Oxford's successful rebuttal of these accusations hardly seems commensurate to the preceding rhetoric.

Geoffrey Sill has written of the *White Staff*:

Its strategy is not to reproduce historical circumstances, but to transform them into ideological types, which are then presented *as* history. If neither Defoe nor his audience were comfortable with the blend, he had nevertheless found the formula out of which he was to make his major fictions.¹⁷

¹⁷ Sill, p. 93.

I understand the ideology with which Defoe identifies Oxford quite differently from Sill: as a popular Machiavellian idea of the statesman rather than an Old Whig ethos of loyal public service. But his general observation is pertinent. In certain sections of the work, the events of the previous four years become simply the means to defining a particular type of political behaviour that had long fascinated Defoe, and which would later become the template for his fictional protagonists. Defoe presents the vision of Oxford which he has sheltered since 1704 as if it has become historical fact.

Another such passage is that describing how Oxford met the challenge of the Schism Bill of 1713, 'a Mine dug to blow up the *White-Staff* (*WS*, I, 33). Defoe recalls that he defused the threat by removing the harshest clauses from the bill, and thus was able to support a bill promoted by the Church and the Queen, without alienating its intended targets, the Dissenters. But any rehearsal of the facts soon yields to vaguer reflections that are only slightly connected to the original affair. Defoe is exercised by the broader idea of emerging in a favourable light from an apparent 'Catch-22' dilemma:

Yet even here the Staff stood its ground, he was so well acquainted with their Management in all its Steps, and made himself so effectually Master of the Plot, even before it broke out, that he baffled them both ways ... Thus the *White-Staff* neither discovered himself one way or other, by which means the Politicians were effectually disappointed, the Attempt to sap the *White-Staff* and its Interest proved Abortive, and he yet held his hold, without receiving any Wound from this Attempt. (*WS*, I, 33)

An almost preternatural anticipation of the motives of his opponents enables Oxford to thwart a seemingly infallible scheme. Defoe's interest here is not so much in any principled stand against the bill, but in the trick of upholding a favourable reputation and avoiding exposure to any potentially hostile quarter.

As I have suggested, the admission that the ministry had taken Jacobites into their fold, and that these had unexpectedly begun to dominate the government, was central to Defoe's initial approach. The impression of honesty might elicit a sympathetic pardon from the reader, and above all it would emphasize that Oxford became marginalized within the

ministry. But in parts II and III in particular, Defoe trumpets this practice as if he has forgotten that he has already demonstrated its failure. He describes the lengths to which the ministry went to convince the Jacobites that they shared a common interest; the understanding

that they had some Necessity to keep up the Vanity, and to give them (the *Jacobites*) all the seeming Encouragement to hope for the End they aimed at, that could come from it, with doing nothing else really for them. (*WS*, II, 11-12)

This admission serves not so much to exculpate Oxford, as to present him excelling at a kind of brinkmanship: by allowing the greatest enemies to the constitution considerable leverage, he will be able to exploit them all the more conclusively, leaving himself and his ministry uniquely secure. The element of risk, the possibility that it could result in a national catastrophe rather than an unprecedented personal triumph, is essential to the feat. Defoe emphasizes that Oxford deliberately sought out the most thoroughgoing Jacobites among the Scottish peers for his purposes, 'distinguishing the profess'd Enemies of the Protestant Succession to serve in Parliament, where the farther Security of that Succession was to be one of the great Works they were to do' (*WS*, II, 15). It is the gulf between the designs of these tools and the end to which they are being employed by Oxford that Defoe relishes.

The impression that Oxford invited outspoken Jacobites into the administration, simply so that he might take a frivolous pleasure in turning them to his own advantage, was to fuel the subsequent controversy surrounding the pamphlets. It is Defoe's insistence upon the singularity of the artifice, and its dependence on Oxford's calculation and execution, that gives this impression. Part II introduces an unusually perceptive Jacobite peer who explains to his more obtuse colleagues:

You don't see all the Wheels of this Machin; we are all trick'd and bubbl'd from the Beginning; the Policy of this damn'd *Staff* has ruin'd us all; and we are wheedled in to be the Instrument of our own Disappointment, by a Management which none of us had Penetration enough to take notice. (*WS*, II, 20-1)

The implication is that the Jacobites are up against an individual of rare political virtuosity, who is beyond the ken of the average Jacobite peer. Part III similarly remarks on these 'BOLD STROKES':

It was the Language of many in those Days, when they commented upon these things, that they were unprecedented; that no Man, in his Station, would have acted after such a Manner. (*WS*, III, 4-5)

It is reported that a lord at that time slapped Oxford on the shoulder and quipped: '*Ah, R___ if thou carriest this Burthen to the Journey's End, thou wilt be the strongest Porter in England*' (*WS*, III, 5). Defoe as narrator goes on to reject this view, but the suggestion that Oxford's conduct was exceptional, which elsewhere in the pamphlets Defoe has been studiously avoiding, has still been made.

One passage in particular was to prove dynamite in the hands of Oxford's enemies. Here, Oxford's manipulation of the Jacobites is evaluated in the same exaggerated fashion as the minister's resilience against the Whigs. It occurs in part II, just after Defoe has described how Oxford defied the horror of the Whigs at the ministry's overtures towards Jacobites with the cry '*Let them come up*':

The *Staff* had such an Ascendant over them, whether by Money or other Management, that they did all his Work, came into all his Measures, and became the most obsequious Wretches in ruining their own Cause, that any Minister of State could possibly desire; never Men were brought in to act so directly contrary to the Interest they profess'd to own; never Men were so handsomely trepann'd by their own Stupidity, or so nicely made Tools to cut the Throat of their own Measures, as the *Jacobites* were, by the Policy and Management of the *Staff*; and yet had the Folly or Misfortune to believe to the last, or within a little of it, that this PAM was *Trump*, and that the Game of the Pretender was [sic] going on. (*WS*, II, 13)

Defoe is dilating on a favourite Machiavellian technique: that of manoeuvring opponents into a position where the longer they believe that they are advancing their designs, the more they are actually demolishing them. The figure orchestrating this situation can scarcely be blamed for taking advantage of them, when they themselves appear to have worked so strenuously against their own interest. Through a sequence of appreciative

adverbs, he gives the kind of fastidious assessment of a slick political manoeuvre that was offered in accounts of Richelieu's or Mazarin's exploits. With typical overstatement, but also a nod towards these sources, Defoe describes Oxford's handling of the Jacobites as 'the most exquisite piece of Management, that has been acted by any Minister of State in this or the last Age' (*WS*, II, 14). Such a claim could not be farther from his attempts elsewhere in the pamphlets to conceal Oxford's particular example in a wider historical context. Defoe's peculiar interests are more in evidence here than any obligation to Oxford; and yet it is Oxford who ultimately takes the consequences for Defoe's self-indulgence.

The *White Staff* tracts are far too complicated and unstable to conform to the conventions of the secret history at that time. While parts I and II are framed by sections in which Oxford does appear as a selfless public servant, in other passages Defoe blazons Oxford's manipulative wizardry at the expense of his politically obtuse rivals. As a result, all the characters appear calculating and devious: the distinction is between those who can carry off their schemes with stealth and aplomb, and those whose steps are obvious and predictable. In part I, Oxford's oblique methods of disarming Whig opponents sets him apart from those Tories who favour a root-and-branch purge of Whigs from office, 'who were for using their Advantages with Rigour, and entirely crushing, ruining, and oppressing those whom he had reduced' (*WS*, I, 19). Defoe's Oxford prefers precaution and deception to direct confrontation. When the cabal of the 'Mitre' (Atterbury), the 'Purse' (Harcourt), and the 'She-Artist' (Masham) are introduced in part II, their crude ambition sets off Oxford's more delicate technique. They conspicuously lack his ability to fashion a bedrock for his interest from the various, contending factions:

They had not had time so much as to form them selves, or to pitch upon the Instruments by which they were to act; as in other Cases popular Designs have been defeated for want of a Head, so those sunk of themselves for want of a Tail; they had not brought in their Men, or so much as intimated to the Men they had mark'd out their Intentions of bringing them in. (*WS*, II, 53)

The capacity for outwitting or managing others at times becomes the touchstone by which a character is judged in the *White Staff*. Defoe juxtaposes Oxford's understanding of the Tory faction with their ineptitude:

In every Step they had taken, they found that the late *Staff* was before them, which way soever they turn'd they found him in their Way, and prepar'd to supplant and countermine them: That his Interest was too strong for them to struggle with, and his Head too long for them to succeed in any Thing that he oppos'd them in.
(*WS*, II, 53)

The chosen targets of Defoe's secret history serve not to suggest a corruption of which the hero is innocent, but to magnify his superior ingenuity. Only 'John Bull' (Bolingbroke) is granted some of Oxford's political attributes, although he in no way challenges his ascendancy.

Conflicting motives lay behind each part of the *White Staff*. These produced an account that must have seemed to Oxford a welter of contradictions and costly indiscretions, but which is for the modern reader perhaps Defoe's most complex and revealing political work.

Defoe had last allowed his political fancies comparable latitude in a public tract when Oxford was at the zenith of his political career, in spring 1711; he was now showing even less restraint when Oxford's fortunes had reached their nadir. A growing resentment and suspicion of Oxford's role as prime minister had found expression during 1714 in some of the most venomous attacks ever written against him. The anonymous satire *The Enigmatical Court* attacks the ministry's unaccountability by ironically proclaiming the 'Mystery' and wonder of its actions. Oxford appears as the self-deluded quack 'Dr. HERMODACTYL', who boasts of 'the Wonderful Cures I have perform'd the Four Years past'. John Toland made Oxford the butt of exactly the kind of Country tract which he had once written under Oxford's auspices, even entitling it *The Art of Restoring*, in a deliberately ironic echo of their earlier collaboration *The Art of Governing by Partys*. It associates General George Monk, who had been instrumental in the Stuart restoration,

with the character 'Sir Roger', who obviously represents Oxford. The latter is introduced with the claim

that he was the greatest Master of *Dissimulation* you ever knew, were it not that it became so habitual to him that he cou'd do nothing without some Trick; and that he so far affected a mysterious Proceeding in the plainest matters (in which he judg'd of others by himself) that in the first place, whatever he did was suspected to have another End than what he publicly avow'd: and that in the second place, the surest way to deceive him was to tell him the naked Truth, which he thinks no Man capable of doing, and so is sure to take his Measures accordingly.

For Sir Roger, mystification and complication are essential to the process of government. It goes on to attack the whole notion of '*single Ministers*' through Oxford: like Monk, he is restoring absolutism in England, although not simply in a monarchical form.¹⁸ It was into this critical climate that Defoe launched a work which in part genuinely touted Oxford as a perpetrator of political marvels.

The sheer variety of contexts in which references to the *White Staff* pamphlets appear, from private letters and crude satires to full-length commentaries on a single part, attests to the scale of the controversy which they provoked. Here I have chosen to focus on only a few of these works; although many of these may at first glance seem to be distinctly 'duncely' tracts scarcely worthy of such attention. But a surprisingly acute perception of the weaknesses and contradictions within Defoe's account underpins their assaults. The most scurrilous, ephemeral tract can illuminate the work and character of authors who have proved more permanent.

That Defoe's pamphlets gave new energy to these assaults on Oxford is perhaps best illustrated by the case of Thomas Burnet's and George Duckett's *A Second Tale of a Tub: or, The History of Robert Powel the Puppet-Show-Man*, a crude allegory of Oxford's political career. Both authors were staunch Whigs and natural opponents of the Oxford

¹⁸ *The Enigmatical Court* (London: J. Baker, 1714), p. 4; [John Toland], *The Art of Restoring* (London: J. Roberts, 1714), p. 8; see pp. 12, 24.

ministry.¹⁹ It appears that they had been steadily working on this caricature for at least two years: in a letter to Duckett from October 1712, Burnet suggests various names that might be applied to Oxford in the tract, including 'Powel'. It was probably close to completion by autumn 1714, but the *White Staff's* appearance in early October precipitated its publication. On 14 October Burnet sent Duckett copies of part I, which he believed to have been written by Oxford himself, and *The History of the Mitre and Purse*, William Pittis's early response to the pamphlet, which I will come to shortly. In his accompanying letter, he informs Duckett that he has 'advertised our History thus':

There is in the Press and speedily will be publishd A Second Tale &c.

N.B. The Readers of this Treatise will see the Secret history of the White Staff to be an Imposture, and this to be the only true and faithfull History of it.²⁰

Clearly Defoe's pamphlet enabled the *Second Tale* to have a topical immediacy which it would otherwise have lacked. It would now be contributing to a particular, ongoing controversy, rather than simply to the general mood of vindictiveness towards Oxford.

It is difficult to ascertain to what degree the work itself directly exploits the *White Staff* affair. Defoe's pamphlet may have simply lent the tract a fresh relevance. But *A Second Tale* does illuminate the field of satiric tropes that surrounded the post of Lord Treasurer (even before it was held by Walpole), into which Defoe had now blundered. The engraving on the frontispiece (the only surviving graphic satire on Oxford) fits the ex-minister's features to the diminutive, hump-backed body of the puppeteer Powell, who had

¹⁹ Burnet was no friend of Defoe's either. In March 1713 he had conspired with William Benson and George Ridpath to have Defoe arrested for three ironic tracts on the succession: *Reasons against the Succession of the House of Hanover*; *And What if the Pretender Should Come?*; and *An Answer to a Question That No Body Thinks of, viz. But What if the Queen Should Die?* See Backscheider, pp. 323-4.

²⁰ *The Letters of Thomas Burnet to George Duckett*, edited by David Nichol Smith (Oxford: The Roxburghe Club, 1914), pp. 10-11, 75.

become a popular attraction at the Little Piazza, Covent Garden and at Bath.²¹ The Treasurer's official white staff serves as his walking-stick, but there is also perhaps a suggestion of it as his means of manipulating the puppets beside him. The engraving capitalizes on the figurative possibilities of the staff, rather as Swift had done in *The Virtues of Sid Hamet the Magician's Rod*, a satire on Oxford's predecessor in that post, Godolphin. Later, the *Tale* recounts how Powell

had by his ingenious Brain, contriv'd an enchanted *White Staff*, that he commonly carry'd in his Hand, the Vertue of which was such, that at Pleasure, he could set all the Company by a Touch, either a Singing, Crying, Laughing, Dancing, Rhyming, Lying, Panegyriizing, Lampooning, Railing, writing Pamphlets, Fighting, or *running away*, &c.²²

By identifying Oxford as 'the *White-Staff*', Defoe was inadvertently invoking the established satiric associations of the Treasurer's staff. Moreover, for Defoe's Oxford, government does sometimes appear to be simply an excuse for a gratuitous display of political sleight of hand.

The Preface also reveals the curious affinity between the *White Staff's* adulatory portrait and hostile caricatures of Oxford. It introduces the tract's hero as

the *Great*, the Illustrious, and the Celebrated Mr. POWEL, the Puppet-Show Man, who has worthily acquired the Reputation of one of the most dextrous Managers of human Mechanism, no *English* Artist ever coming in vie with him --- His Wires are perfectly invisible, his Puppets are well jointed, and very apt to follow the Motions of his directing Hand.²³

²¹ For Powell, see John Ashton, *Social Life in the Reign of Queen Anne*, 2 vols (London: Chatto & Windus, 1882), I, 285-6, 295. For the political connotations of conjurers, puppeteers, posture-masters and other street artists renowned for their 'dexterity', see Rogers, 'Shapes and Postures', in *Literature and Popular Culture*, pp. 71-86.

²² [Thomas Burnet and George Duckett], *A Second Tale of a Tub; or, The History of Robert Powel the Puppet-Show-Man* (London: J. Roberts, 1714), p. 136.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. xxvi.

There is much here that finds an echo in Defoe's less ironic tributes to Oxford: the exaggerated rhetoric, the mock-aesthetic evaluation of his skill at employing human tools and the suggestion of a providential supervision of events.

The first *White Staff* pamphlet was equally a godsend to John Dunton, as he prepared for publication his sequel to the tract *Neck or Nothing*, which had appeared in 1713 and had predicted Oxford's downfall with some relish. It had included a letter designed to expose the 'true Character or SECRET HISTORY' of Oxford and Bolingbroke.²⁴ The novelty of a secret history which sought to defend Oxford, but unconsciously parodied the Whig misrepresentation of him, encouraged Dunton to give his new tract, *Queen Robin*, the subtitle of 'the *True Secret History of the White-Staff*, in Answer to that *False one*, lately publish'd by the *Earl of O--ford*'. The prefatory poem takes satirical advantage of the symbol of the Treasurer's office, remarking that 'His *White-Staff*, like a Royal Clew,/ Has brought him to the Ax'. As the main text was written before the *White Staff* pamphlet, it does not allude directly to it, although the titles of 'the Bull', 'Purse' and 'Mitre' may have been added at the last moment. But it is not hard to see how Defoe's pamphlet would have appeared to validate Dunton's accusations. One of Dunton's main contentions is that Oxford became a kind of arbitrary ruler, engrossing all the power which was once vested in parliament:

Nay, I may say, the Legislative Power amongst his Creatures was singly lodg'd in him, the Executive he distributed, as he judg'd properest for his Ends, he had his *Active* and *Non-Active* Tools.²⁵

This impression would only have been strengthened by the *White Staff's* tendency to home in on Oxford's personal responsibility for the management of political factions.

²⁴ [John Dunton], *Neck or Nothing* (London: T. Warner, 1713), p. 22.

²⁵ Dunton, *Queen Robin* (London: M. Brudenell, 1714), pp. vi, 49.

But *Queen Robin* is most significant for its 'Postscript' on the recently published first part of the *White Staff* ('that fabulous Performance'), which imparts an insight that reverberates through many of the subsequent replies to the pamphlets. Dunton expresses confidence that *Queen Robin* has already dealt with the claims raised in the *White Staff*. But he also hints that no attempt to refute the pamphlet's defence of Oxford would be required anyway: it is its own worst enemy.

If the Reader will give himself the Trouble of comparing our *Secret Histories*, I believe he will be of my Mind, and will likewise be convinced of the Truth of my Relations, when he sees so many of the *Matters of Fact* owned by the very Person I charge them on, and who, 'tis not to be imagin'd, would by his own weak Apologies, *corroborate my Evidence*, (and that without knowing I had wrote on the Subject) if Guilt, and *the force of Self-Conviction* had not extorted those Confessions from him. With that View, or upon what Motives, he discover'd *so many vile things of himself*, I will not pretend to guess; but sure I am, his Enemies could not have wish'd or done him a greater Injury, since *his own History confirms those Crimes to be justly ascrib'd to him*, which before were receiv'd by many, as Slanders; by others, as Prejudice; and by most, but as uncertain Reports.²⁶

Behind the usual Grub Street persiflage, there is a sense of both triumph and disbelief that an apparently authorized defence of Oxford could be predicated upon the very characteristics with which he has been charged by his most strident opponents. Whether Dunton actually believed Oxford was its author or not, the pamphlet's air of authority and cloying tributes to Oxford's political genius fatally supplied the grounds for such an assumption.

A similar note of incredulity is struck by one of Oxford's allies. In a private letter of 19 October, Dr. Arbuthnot wrote to Swift of the first *White Staff* tract:

Yow have read ere this time the History of the white Staff, which is either contriv'd by an enemy or by himself, to bring down vengeance, & I have told some of his nearest friends so. all the Dragon can say will not give him one single freind

²⁶ Ibid., p. 65.

amongst the whole party, & therefore I even wonder at him, which yow will say is a strange thing.²⁷

Arbuthnot is torn between the recognition that much of the pamphlet seems designed to incriminate rather than exculpate Oxford, and the rumour that it is Oxford's own work. It could with equal plausibility be a scathing calumny or an ill-conceived attempt at self-justification.

If current attributions are to be believed, the exploitation of this distinct ambivalence in Defoe's pamphlets was spearheaded by one author in particular: that strenuous antagonist of Oxford, Swift and Defoe, John Oldmixon.²⁸ He seems to have been responsible for the three-part *Detection of the Sophistry and Falsities of the Pamphlet, Entitul'd, The Secret History of the White Staff*, which responded promptly to each part of Defoe's work as they appeared. Much of his reaction is predictable. As I have remarked earlier, Oldmixon was always vigilant for any traces of sympathy for French politics, and his *Arcana Gallica: or, The Secret History of France* had appeared earlier that year. Defoe's casual use of the term 'Prime Minister' and references to Richelieu and Mary de Medici were guaranteed to set his hackles rising.

But more perceptively, Oldmixon recognizes that Defoe's verbose appreciations of Oxford's management could be grist to a pointed attack on the ex-minister; especially if these are assumed to be an accurate reflection of Oxford's own view of events. Oldmixon never tired of slurring Oxford through the suggestion that he and Defoe shared the same political outlook. He suggests much later, in his *History of England* after 1688, that Harley employed Defoe 'as a Man whose Conscience was exactly of a Size with his own',

²⁷ *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, edited by Harold Williams, 5 vols (Oxford: OUP, 1963-1972), II, 136-7.

²⁸ For Oldmixon's general view of Defoe, Swift and Oxford, see Rogers, 'The Dunces Answers Back: John Oldmixon on Swift and Defoe', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 14 (1972), 33-43. However, Rogers does not mention any of the replies to the *White Staff* which the *ESTC* now attributes to Oldmixon.

and that 'Mr *Harley*'s Genius was so near a-kin to *Foe*'s, that he cou'd not but take him into his Confidence as soon as he got Acquaintance with him'. Defoe's Machiavellian defence of Oxford in the *White Staff* encourages him to assume that the two men are interchangeable. Oldmixon wilfully misconstrues Defoe's indulgence of a private fascination with the political master-stroke as Oxford's tactless braggadocio:

We shall see presently what a wonder he makes of himself; such a Politician, that if you'll take his own word for it, the *Machiavel* of the *Apennine* was a Driv'ler to him of *Penmenmaur*.

In a number of passages, Oldmixon gloats upon Oxford's apparent willingness to spill the beans about the distinctly Machiavellian brand of politics to which he subscribes, and to substantiate the charges which the Whigs have been making against him. Defoe's ready admission that Oxford used the impeachment of Sacheverell as a means of embroiling the old ministry in a fatal battle with the Church, prompts the comment:

Here this dextrous Cunning Politician opening his Heart with as much Simplicity as his Brother could have done, assures us, that the *Faction* trick'd us out of all the Blessings which would have attended a *Glorious* Peace, purely by using the Name of the *Church*.

All the efforts of Oldisworth, Swift and other Tory propagandists appear to have been unravelled by the *White Staff*.

Is this the subtle, the crafty, the *double fac'd* Janus? Do such Truths as these come out of the *Staff's* Mouth? Truths as simple as those that come out of the Mouths of Babes and Sucklings. Truths which the Whigs have said a Thousand and a Thousand Times, and been bely'd and bedivell'd for it by the *Examiner*, his Brother of *St. Patrick*, and their Brethren.²⁹

²⁹ John Oldmixon, *The History of England, during the Reigns of King William and Queen Mary, Queen Anne, King George I* (London: Thomas Cox, 1735), pp. 456, 519; [Oldmixon], *A Detection of the Sophistry and Falsities of the Pamphlet, Entitul'd, The Secret History of the White Staff*, part I (London: J. Roberts, 1714), pp. 8-9, 12, 14.

Oxford can be mocked through the irony that while he boasts of his ability to turn any eventuality to his advantage, he is in fact damaging his interest by so shamelessly exposing his warped political values.

Once he has feigned the assumption that Oxford is the real author of the *White Staff*, it is only one step further to change the text itself from third to first person.

Oldmixon makes no attempt to be consistent: he can claim that part I has been 'written by Defoe, as is to be seen by his abundance of Words, his false Thoughts, and false *English*', before converting one of its passages into Oxford's own words. Defoe's account is itself so grotesque, Oldmixon seems to imply, that such a transparent distortion of his text is permissible.

I beg the Readers leave to present him here with a Speech that *Dan. Defoe* makes for the *Staff* upon his Triumph, by virtue of the Major Vote of the Dozen aforesaid, a cunning Trick that; and such as no *Prime* ever did, or ever will think of again ...

'However, I kept my Station, my Policy, and Management, as Prime Minister, defeated all the Attempts which the displaced Party had made or saw room to make, to break in upon me. In every Battel I had the Victory; and albeit they never fail'd to renew the Assault, yet they found me so well fortify'd in every Part, that many began to see their Mistake, and to own they had better have accomodated things at first, that they never thought I could have maintain'd my self in such a manner as they found, and that no Head but mine could have extricated itself out of so many Labyrinths.'³⁰

Oldmixon garbles Defoe's attempts to harmonize Oxford's recent career with his ideal of the statesman, to suggest an insufferable self-conceit. A former head of government, rather than a deluded author, now appears to be revelling in a dangerously Machiavellian notion of the politician.

The wheeze of putting Defoe's language straight into Oxford's mouth is taken to a more impudent extreme (probably by Oldmixon again) in *The White-Staff's Speech to the Lords*, which appears to have followed the publication of Defoe's second pamphlet. A

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 7, 20-1.

speech in which Oxford makes a clean breast of his treason, in the confidence that the Lords will show mercy, is fashioned from quotations and inferences drawn from Defoe's pamphlets. Defoe's part II had provided a new set of passages labelling Oxford's manipulation of Jacobites, which Oldmixon parodies mercilessly in the second part of *A Detection of the Sophistry and Falsities*:

I shall wonder much, if any of them have Patience with him to hear him make his Brags. *How he impos'd upon them, how he trepann'd them, how he dup'd them, how he bubbled them, how he trick'd them, what Tools he made of them, what a parcel of stupid Rogues they were, what egregious Blockheads.*³¹

In *The White-Staff's Speech*, Oldmixon recasts such passages as the ramblings of a man whose grasp on political reality has been weakened by self-importance.

The D. of H_____ was so sensible that I *trick'd, dup'd, bubbled, trepann'd* and *impos'd* upon them, that I made 'em my *Tools* and my *Slaves*, that I all the while *laugh'd at them*, he swore *G__d d___n him, he's no more for the Pretender than the Grand Signior, by G__d*. Truly, I did make sad *Fools* and *obsequious Wretches* of 'em, and never in the World was there such a company of *stupid Rogues*. For, notwithstanding I made one of 'em a Captain of the Life-Guard, and another an Ambassador and Plenipotentiary to *France*, yet were they such Idiots as to flatter themselves, I had given them an opportunity to serve their Master at *St. Germain's*. The Stupidity of which will plainly appear to your Lordships.

Oxford is so absorbed in describing his deception of the Jacobites, that he is apparently unaware of his own self-deception in believing that a faction to whom he had awarded obviously influential positions held no sway over the ministry. Again and again, the discrepancy between Defoe's overblown accounts of Oxford's expertise and the historical facts is exploited to ironic effect. Oldmixon's Oxford brags of his handling of the Purse, Mitre and '*Female Buz*':

Your Lordships have seen how I dup'd and bubbled them, by making so many of them Members of both Houses of Parliament, to prevent their raising a Rebellion for the Pretender in *Scotland*, and will easily perceive what a sad Delusion they

³¹ [Oldmixon], *A Detection of the Sophistry and Falsities* etc., part II (London: J. Roberts, 1714), p. 18.

were under.³²

The sheer illogic of this remark makes it abundantly clear to the reader that if anyone is under 'a sad Delusion', it is Oxford himself.

This technique is borrowed by a later response to the affair, the amusing *Dialogue between the Staff, the Mitre, and the Purse*, which particularly makes play with the 'Glosses and Colourings' which Defoe applies to Oxford's political character. The statesman's own words are couched in a Machiavellian language derived from Defoe's account, and met with derision from the other two characters. For instance, the Staff congratulates himself on his management of the Jacobites:

Did I not shew one of the greatest Master-pieces of Cunning and *Finesse* that has been play'd in any Age, by my making the Favourites of the P____r's Interest in those Parts, to be sent up as Re____ves in Parliament? ... The Snare that I laid for them, was to draw them out of those Parts where they were most capable of doing Mischief, and place them where they could see their Project disappointed, without being able to move a Hand to help themselves.

It is Defoe's elated appraisal of Oxford's expertise, his tendency to reduce complex episodes to a single satisfying manoeuvre, that affords comedy at Oxford's expense. The Staff seems incapable of giving a rational, detailed defence of his record, instead continually withdrawing into these formulaic, bejargoned self-tributes. After one such preening account of his successes, the Mitre gives the sarcastic retort: 'O renown'd Son of Bravery! Thou Half-*Matchiavel*, and Half-*Achilles*! Thou *Sorites* of unintelligible Lies and Mysteries!'³³ The author has pin-pointed exactly the combination of heroic intrepidity and political deviousness that Defoe attributes to Oxford: the sense that a living politician is being transformed into a mythical character, concealing the grubby details of his career.

³² [Oldmixon], *The White-Staff's Speech to the Lords* (London: J. Roberts, 1714), pp. 14, 16.

³³ *A Dialogue between the Staff, the Mitre, and the Purse* (London: J. Roberts, 1715), Preface, pp. 17-8, 14.

The replies to the *White Staff* pamphlets from all quarters fasten onto those passages in which Defoe presents Oxford as a kind of political performance artist. The Tory *Considerations upon The Secret History of the White Staff* (sometimes attributed, perhaps rather implausibly, to Bolingbroke) repeatedly undercuts Oxford's apparent desire to be apotheosized as 'a *Machiavel* in Politicks' with the uncomfortable truth. For example:

The Schism Bill was laid as a Trap for you, but you were too wise to bite, and by a wonderful Artifice, peculiar to your L---p, took all that was bad out of the Bill, and yet kept all that was good in it. My L---d, I have your Word for this, and so must ask no further; but what shall I say to those Persons who have all this while imposed upon me, by telling me, your L---p did not speak one Word thro' the whole Debate; that you sat dumb, and swelling with a Discontent that visibly spoke your Affections to the Bill.³⁴

This parodies the *White Staff*'s view of the affair as a crisis which Oxford miraculously turns to his advantage, before reminding that in reality Oxford was a frustrated, passive bystander rather than the active orchestrator of the affair.

The two-part *History of the Mitre and Purse*, which is generally attributed to the Tory journalist William Pittis, is much closer to what readers would have expected from a secret history than the *White Staff* pamphlets. Atterbury, Harcourt and Masham are presented as honest and disinterested, while Oxford appears as a Machiavellian caricature, constantly intriguing and manoeuvring in pursuit of power and wealth. But this travesty of Oxford is nevertheless indebted to those passages in which Defoe expands on his private notion of the minister. Echoes of Defoe's appreciative phrasing crop up in Pittis's attempted character assassination. Oxford faces similar challenges to his ingenuity in vindication and calumny alike. For example, in Part II of Pittis's work, he soothes the fears of the Kirk that the ministry's favour towards the Jacobite peers might make the established Church vulnerable to the Episcopal clergy in Scotland, even while he is still

³⁴ [Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke], *Considerations upon the Secret History of the White Staff* (London: A. Moore, 1714), pp. 24, 22-3.

encouraging the misplaced hopes of the Jacobites. His understanding of the Kirk's misgivings

made him have recourse to that Stratagem of seeming to increase their Power that he might lessen it. Nor did he fall short of his Aim in that Point, for while he ingratiated himself with the one Party, by the removal of those who were the greatest Obstacles to their Religious Tyranny, he gain'd the Affections of the other, who fondly believ'd they were altogether in his good Graces, on the Promotions of their Patrons, which really ended in the Depression and Discouragement of themselves ... he was so much Master of the Art of Dissimulation, as to lead them on with hopes of every Thing they could possibly Wish for, while he was doing what he could to sink them into the utmost Despair.³⁵

Pittis's attribution of cunning to Oxford, although conventional in a secret history, is made all the more authoritatively because of the precedent for this characterization set by the *White Staff*, a work apparently supervised by Oxford himself.

One response to the scandal raised by the first two *White Staff* pamphlets stands out from the others: *The Secret History of the Secret History of the White Staff*, which appeared on 4 January 1715. It takes as its subject not so much the contents of the original pamphlets, as the whole controversy, which it attempts to expose as a scam concocted by booksellers. Its determination to prove that neither Oxford nor Defoe are responsible for the pamphlets has led to the plausible suggestion that it is written by Defoe himself. The tract certainly advertises the original pamphlets, exaggerating their political impact, even while it denies their inherent significance. At one point, its narrator recalls entering a coffee-house 'and finding the whole Discourse, *as for some Time it was*, carried on by opposite Parties upon the Subject of those Books'.³⁶ Defoe might have intended it to keep

³⁵ [William Pittis], *The History of the Mitre and Purse*, part II (London: J. Morphew, 1714), p. 8.

³⁶ *The Secret History of the Secret History of the White Staff* (London: S. Keimer, 1715), p. 8. For a discussion of the work, see Furbank and Owens, *The Canonisation of Daniel Defoe*, p. 169.

the affair on the boil, in anticipation of a sequel and further editions comprising all three parts.

If the tract is not written by Defoe, it nevertheless contains some perceptive criticism on the *White Staff* pamphlets. One of its central arguments is that they are merely entertaining fiction through which booksellers are attempting to make a tidy profit, not an authorized account of recent events. It ridicules those who have responded to them so earnestly:

It is provoking to the last Degree, to see what Success these Men have had in the Trick they have put upon the Town, and how universally all sorts of Men have run into the Cheat, and been bubbled to accept these Romances for a true Narration, and have taken the Fable for a History, without enquiring into the Things whether they were impos'd upon *Yea*, or *No*.

All those who have taken the work literally are mocked as the booksellers' dupes, reading a mere 'Romance' as if it were Oxford's own political testament. The tract shrewdly touches upon the fabrication and overstatement at work in the pamphlets. The narrator voices his own suspicions to a Quaker who has been at the centre of a conversation in the coffee-house about the work:

I observ'd a great many Things, which in my Opinion look like Romances; that I often thought the whole was a continu'd Fiction; that some Things were put in, which if they were true, no Body could know, but those whose Interest it was not to make them Publick; That other Things were mention'd, which were not probable, sundry Speeches form'd, which I believ'd were never spoken.

Similarly, the Quaker recalls a private conversation with Oxford himself, in which the former minister had insisted

that many, if not most of the Facts in these Books were False, and that those, which had Truth in them, were mingled with such abundance of Romance, as that they did not so much as appear to be dress'd up like the Truth; that he dislik'd every Thing in those Books, and also the Manner, in which it was there plac'd; and that no one could oblige him more, than by letting the World know, that he disown'd what was there reflecting upon others, and despis'd what pretended to be in behalf of himself.

Later, those who used the pamphlets as the pretext for attacking Oxford are described as having 'made Fools of themselves and of the World, by fighting with a Man of Straw, of other People's dressing up'.³⁷ The tract seems to recognize how in the *White Staff* pamphlets Oxford becomes a fictional protagonist with only tenuous ties to his actual deeds and motives.

It is equally shrewd in perceiving that the clearing of Oxford's reputation was not the primary motive behind the composition of the pamphlets, and uses this observation to prove that the minister had no responsibility for them. The Quaker claims

That if it had been done by Lord *Oxford*, as thou say'st it was, and that it was for his own Vindication, he would not have Written that, which is so unfit to perform what it is suppos'd to do, and that he would have vindicated himself in a better Manner, or not have medelled with it in Publick.

This sense of their inadequacy as propaganda reappears in the narrator's criticism of those

who, by laying such stress upon what they read, in every Pamphlet, gave a Weight to them, when they had not any in themselves, and fancying, that this or that Great Person had set his Head, or Hand to work to work to write these Things; they made them thereby effectual to do that Evil, which they were Originally not design'd to do, and which, if they were let alone, they would not be able to do.³⁸

The tract hints at certain stylistic traits in the pamphlets which militate against any pretensions to propaganda. It appears to understand how their internal contradictions incapacitate them either as a partial apology for Oxford, or a responsible history.

So, could Defoe have written it? Certainly it is unique in turning the tensions within parts I and II against those who replied to the pamphlets, rather than against their author and subject. Pittis (whom the tract names and even suggests, momentarily, as the mercenary author of both the originals and their replies!) and Oldmixon are its primary targets. It remarks pointedly that

³⁷ *The Secret History of the Secret History of the White Staff*, pp. 6, 12-13, 15, 35.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 21.

tho' at the first View they found themselves capable to detect the *Falsity* and *Sophistry* of the Books themselves, as it is express'd in some of their Answers; yet they could not avoid the Snare of taking the Books for Genuine, and for a Design of the *Staff*, to start something into the World in his own Vindication.³⁹

It would not be unnatural for Defoe now to seek out contradictions within the very replies which had capitalized upon the ambivalence of his own pamphlets.

Defoe may have concluded that he could both maintain interest in the controversy and save Oxford from further embarrassment, by admitting that the pamphlets were primarily written to entertain rather than to serve Oxford's interest. If so, he may have been influenced in this policy by Manley's autobiographical *History of Rivella*, which had appeared earlier in 1714 and had described the method which she had used in 1709 to deflect Sunderland's questions about the political interests behind *The New Atalantis*. She recalls that she denied

that she had a further Design than writing for her own Amusement and Diversion in the Country; without intending particular Reflections on Characters: When this was not believ'd, and the contrary urg'd very home to her by several Circumstances and Likenesses; she said then it must be *Inspiration*, because knowing her own Innocence she could account for it no other Way.

She goes on to wonder whether the prosecution was eventually dropped because the Whigs

were ashamed to bring a Woman to her Trial for writing a few amorous Trifles purely for her own Amusement, or that our Laws were defective, as most Persons conceiv'd, because she had serv'd her self with Romantick Names, and a feign'd Scene of Action.⁴⁰

Defoe too may have felt that playing up the fictional character of his controversial pamphlets was the most prudent response to his critics. He could make such a claim quite ingenuously about the *White Staff*: the replies would have made him conscious of the

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 7-8.

⁴⁰ *The Novels of Mary Delariviere Manley*, edited by Patricia Koster, 2 vols (Gainesville, Flor.: Scholars' Facsimiles Reprint, 1971), II, 849, 850-1.

degree to which his fantasies about Oxford's role had found expression in the pamphlets and disqualified them as propaganda. However, if he did write the tract with these motives, they did not prevent him entirely from reverting to old habits in his portrayal of Oxford in part III, on which he would have begun work immediately.

In his Epilogue to *The White-Staff's Speech to the Lords*, Oldmixon argues that Defoe's words can quite reasonably be taken as Oxford's, because the statesman has made no effort to distance himself publicly from the pamphlets. However he adds: 'if he should deny every Word that has been said, and pretend he never set his Historian to Work, I shall not at all be surpriz'd at it'. This is what Oxford eventually did during the first week of July 1715. The following statement appears at the head of the advertisements column in *The London Gazette* for that week:

Whereas some Months since a Pamphlet, Entitul'd, *The Secret History of the White Staff*, and Lately another Pamphlet, Entitled, *An Account of the Conduct of Robert Earl of Oxford*, have been Printed and Published; these are to inform the Publick, that neither of the said Pamphlets have been written by the said Earl, or with his Knowledge, or by his Direction or Encouragement; but on the contrary he has reason to believe from several Passages therein contained, that it was the Intention of the Author to do him Prejudice; and that the last of the said Pamphlets is Published at this Juncture to that end.⁴¹

Oxford himself evidently perceived, perhaps from the surrounding controversy as much as Defoe's original pamphlets, that the *White Staff* had done more to implicate him further in the charge of treason than to sow a favourable impression of his period of office. His mention of certain particularly harmful 'Passages' is worth noting: he perhaps has in mind those sections of the *White Staff* which identify Oxford with the type of contrivances and terms more often reserved for Whig burlesques of the minister, and which were the singlemost feature of the pamphlets preyed upon by his enemies.

⁴¹ [Oldmixon], *The White Staff's Speech to the Lords*, p. 31; *The London Gazette*, Tuesday 5 July - Saturday 9 July 1715.

But what of the other pamphlet lumped together with the *White Staff*? Oxford's inclusion of *An Account of the Conduct* here suggests that it was rumoured to have been written by Defoe, and it is indeed a quite plausible attribution. But although it seems to take some of its argument from the *White Staff*, it is a much less reckless pamphlet: it is in fact exactly the kind of dependable propaganda which Oxford might have been entitled to expect from Defoe the previous October, instead of a three-part secret history. Rather than inadvertently colluding with hostile satires against Oxford, this tract sets out with the professed intention of taking a dispassionate view of its subject, in contrast to the many attempts 'to calumniate and misrepresent him to the World'. There is a vestige of the Oxford of the *White Staff* pamphlets here, in the passing tributes to his ability to surmount the obstacles placed before him by the Whigs. But he is generally more punctilious public servant than political acrobat:

The *Treasurer* likewise took especial Care to have all Business transacted in the proper Offices, and sign'd by the Hands whose Province it was; thereby restoring the Administration to its natural Course, and delivering the Government from the Grievance of a PRIME MINISTER; and this is evident now, even to the Surprise of his Enemies, who having suppos'd, that the *Treasurer* transacted every thing, as had been the Belief; and for which all along the Party loaded him with infinite Aspersions, find now that he really managed nothing separately; and rather employ'd himself to preserve the Oeconomy of the Administration, and see the publick Business distributed into the proper Hands, and then leaving those Hands to discharge their Duty, than interposing his own Authority, or encroaching upon the Province of the Ministers.

This thoroughly repudiates the impression given in much of the *White Staff* that Oxford was single-handedly maintaining the ministry through manoeuvre and manipulation. The tract sustains the line which Defoe only adopts fitfully in the earlier pamphlets: that Oxford lost out to a high Tory faction within the ministry at least a year before he actually resigned, and therefore should not be held to account for all of its policies. It seeks to prove that 'He enjoy'd the Place, but never could execute the Office', and makes a virtue of

his falling victim to the kind of manoeuvre which, in the *White Staff*, Oxford himself accomplishes. It remarks on the usurping faction:

They carry'd every thing their own Way, even over the Belly of the *Treasurer*; and had the particular Direction of those things, of which he had the Scandal, for all their ill Management lies at his Door, in the Esteem of his Enemies.⁴²

The faction were able to govern the country without exposing themselves to the scandal which greeted their measures.

If the tract is Defoe's, it suggests that he was conscious of how his own preoccupations had complicated the *White Staff* pamphlets. It is possible that he deliberately framed his secret history with two pamphlets, *Advice to the People of Great Britain* and *An Account of the Conduct*, that are much more consistent and efficient vindications of Oxford, though they received considerably less attention. Why Oxford should have sought to distance himself from the latter is unclear: unless the *White Staff* affair had left him convinced that any defence rumoured to be by Defoe would only make a bad situation worse, and that it was best to forestall a controversy at the earliest stage.

While Defoe seems to have needed Oxford's absorption into history as the licence for a more fictitious, irresponsible portrait, others were attempting to pre-empt posterity's verdict on the minister before his resignation. Swift was working on his *History of the Four Last Years of the Queen* from as early as 1712, and continued to reflect on the Oxford ministry in a series of essays over the next four years. The sensitivity of Oxford, Bolingbroke and Oxford's son ensured that only one of these saw publication in Swift's lifetime (*Some Free Thoughts upon the Present State of Affairs in England* in 1741), and they were no doubt composed as much for his own satisfaction as for public consumption. But his desire to influence public judgement on the ministry should not be doubted: he seriously aspired to being Historiographer-Royal (as his distant cousin Dryden had been

⁴² *An Account of the Conduct of Robert Earl of Oxford* (London, 1715), pp. 3, 39-40, 95, 95.

during the Restoration), and was deeply frustrated at not being able to have *A History of the Four Last Years* and *Some Free Thoughts* published before Oxford's inevitable fall.⁴³

Swift seeks to establish a judicious, but generally favourable view of the Oxford ministry with a Country slant, before more popular caricatures of Oxford proliferate. But his determination to keep Oxford closely identified with the Country ethos often seems to be underpinned by his anxiety about certain characteristics of Oxford's: particularly his secretiveness, detachment and indolence. In *Some Free Thoughts* (written during June 1714) he is at pains to expose the whole notion of political *arcana*. Swift gives the example of a minister who conceals 'an essential Circumstance' from his counsellors and friends, so that a particular decision seems much more inspired than it actually is. The minister is able to scorn the reservations of his misinformed colleagues and wait for his policy to be triumphantly vindicated:

Thus he grows to abound in Secrets, and Reserves, even towards those with whom he ought to act in the greatest Confidence and Concert; and thus the world is brought to judge, that whatever be the Issue and Event, it was all foreseen, Contrived, and brought to pass by some Master-Stroke of Politicks. I could produce innumerable Instances from my own Memory and Observation, of Events imputed to the profound Skill and Address of a Minister, which in reality were either the meer Effects of Negligence, Weakness, Humour, Passion or Pride; or at best, but the Natural Course of Things left to themselves.

Swift follows Toland, Davenant and other authors of the Country persuasion in rejecting the Machiavellian conception of the politician. But we suspect that he is not simply rehearsing conventional criticisms: although he may not believe that Oxford has deliberately mystified the process of government, he nevertheless fears that such an impression might encourage that view from enemies and misguided friends alike. He goes on to remark that

Too great an Affectation of Secrecy, is usually thought to be attended with those little Intrigues and Refinements which among the Vulgar denominate a Man a great

⁴³ See Downie, *Jonathan Swift*, pp. 194, 204, 257, 335.

Politician, but among others is apt whether deservedly or no, to acquire the Opinion of Cunning; A Talent which differs as much from the true Knowledge of Government, as that of an Attorney from an able Lawyer.⁴⁴

Swift does not apply such reflections to Oxford at this stage, but surely has him in mind. He fears that people will only mistake the appearance of intrigue given by the Oxford ministry for the reality. By exposing this warped perception of politics, Swift no doubt hoped to limit the damage caused to Oxford's reputation by the kind of tracts that were bound to follow, as well as to vent some of his own uneasiness about Oxford.

The *White Staff* pamphlets must have confirmed Swift's worst fears about how Oxford would be depicted after his resignation. In *Some Free Thoughts*, he gives an example of the kind of political history which only misleads the public and reflects badly on the ministry:

During this very Sessions of Parliament, a most ingenious Gentleman, who has much Credit with those in Power, would needs have it, that in the late Dissensions at Court, which grew too high to be any longer a Secret; the whole Matter was carried with the utmost Dexterity on one Side, and with manifest ill Conduct on the other. To prove this he made use of the most plausible Topicks, drawn from the Nature and Dispositions of the several Persons concerned, as well as of Her Majesty ... And gave me a Detail of the whole with such an Appearance of Probability, as committed to writing would pass for an admirable Piece of secret History.

He could almost be describing the pamphlets which Defoe began to write a few months later. The *White Staff* combines just such exaggerated tributes to Oxford's political skill with scorn against his rivals, disguising a distortion of the facts as an insider's first-hand account. As if to counter the effect of such a work, Swift more readily admits Oxford's shortcomings and self-consciously sticks to the facts in his subsequent essays on the ministry. Episodes which Defoe is inclined to present as sublime political manoeuvres appear in a more mundane light in Swift's version of events. In *Memoirs, Relating to that Change which Happened in the Queen's Ministry in the Year 1710*, he treats Oxford's

⁴⁴ *The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift*, edited by Herbert Davis et al, 16 vols (Oxford: OUP, 1939-75), VIII, 78, 79, 80-1.

handling of the October Club with none of Defoe's extravagance: the minister silenced them 'by that very obvious contrivance of dividing them among themselves, and rendering them jealous of each other'. The idea of exploiting party divisions for the sake of maintaining an appearance of stable authority is consistently treated with scepticism by Swift. Similarly, he mocks the way that the failure of the Tories to secure as great a majority as they might have done in the 1710 election was

by some refiners of both parties, numbered among the strains of Mr. Harley's politicks, who was said to avoid an over-great majority, which is apt to be unruly, and not enough under the management of a ministry.⁴⁵

In reality, according to Swift, the Tories had simply felt that they could rely on the popular mood following the Sacheverell trial. 'Refiners' like Defoe impute predictable or incidental occurrences to the calculation of a gifted politician. The *White Staff* pamphlets, then, were exactly the kind of response to Oxford's fall which Swift had expected and tried to discredit. They defended Oxford as a Modern Whig, while Swift had sought to assess his career from the Country perspective. They would also perhaps have aggravated a niggling suspicion in Swift that by 1714 a Machiavellian account would actually give a more accurate reflection of Oxford's political character than one imbued with Country principles.

Defoe must have recognized that the *White Staff* pamphlets had been singularly unhelpful to Oxford. But this did not prevent him from repeating this attempt to compound secret history and propaganda less than two years after the controversy had subsided. *Minutes of the Negotiations of Monsr. Mesnager* was published on 17 June 1717, exactly a week before Oxford was brought from the Tower to Westminster for his long-awaited trial. The work's primary intent was clearly to disseminate a favourable impression of Oxford: to suggest that he had played only a marginal role in the ministry's

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 79, 125, 126.

now infamous peace negotiations with France, and to depict him as not only innocent of any design to establish the Pretender on the throne, but as a constant hindrance to the French-Jacobite conspiracy. Laura Ann Curtis has shown how Defoe consciously obscures historical detail in this work, to imply that the ministry entered the negotiations out of necessity and with caution.⁴⁶ My concern here is to examine how Defoe also saw the work as another opportunity to write about political events of which he had first-hand experience, in the manner that court politics during the time of Richelieu and Mazarin had been recounted in the 1680s and 1690s.

The adoption of the French agent Mesnager as narrator allows Defoe unprecedented freedom to explore the kind of politics which he considered peculiarly French. From the start, Louis XIV appears as the archetypal French statesman, the successor to Richelieu and Mazarin. His individual role in orchestrating the peace negotiations, while nevertheless remaining aloof in Paris, is emphasized. The events described in the book are summarized as

the most secret Negotiation, and the best managed Affair of its Kind, that perhaps was ever carried on in the World; in which his Majesty shewed his most exquisite Endowment, the Direction of every Part being his own, and being himself the Spring, and very Movement of the whole. (*Mes*, p. 37)

The King determines the course of the negotiations, even while these appear to rest in the hands of Mesnager and the English ministers. Mesnager describes him as one 'who saw with other Eyes than most Men, and who sometimes knew the Tempers and Characters both of Men and Nations of Men, better than they knew their own' (*Mes*, p. 14). The King is apparently able to keep several steps ahead of his enemies, and to have them unwittingly facilitate his schemes. When the Earl of Rochester is promoted to the ministry, the King already foresees the accession of the Pretender:

⁴⁶ Laura Curtis, *The Versatile Defoe* (London: Prior, 1979), pp. 341-9. See also Furbank and Owens, *The Canonisation of Daniel Defoe*, pp. 170-1.

These were remote Prospects, and such as no *Person* was capable of forming Ideas of, *at so great a Distance*, but a King, whose Soul was equal to all the Labyrinths and Meanders in the Politicks of all the Nations round him, and who fixed in his View, and made present to him the rational Deductions that others thought themselves very early in, if they formed the same several Years afterward. (*Mes*, p. 79)

However, these encomiums are usually imbued with irony. The King's presentiments are often proved wrong: Rochester dies suddenly and Jacobite hopes are never fulfilled. Events do not always conform to French designs. So, Mesnager's tributes to the King allow Defoe simultaneously to evoke the French political genius in a congenial style, as he had originally in the *Review*, and to be seen to satirize French delusions.

But the subject-matter also affords opportunities for showing the French and English in collusion as well as opposition, for suggesting that they are in some ways kindred political nations. Although Mesnager naturally insists on the inferiority of English politicians to the French King, he adds:

tho' it is true, that *when they came to take some of their Measures from our Monarch*, they became as much superior to the rest of the Allies, who neither by Force or Polity were ever able to break into their Measures, or turn them from those Steps which they resolved upon, from and in Concert with his Majesty's Councils. (*Mes*, p. 37)

Behind Mesnager's grudging respect, we can sense Defoe entertaining the notion of the French and English indulging in pleurably elaborate intrigues, to the exclusion of the more obtuse allies. Mesnager later gives a highly flattering account of how the Oxford ministry published the 'Heads of the Preliminary Articles', with the aim of encouraging speculation and debate about a peace, to take the surprise out of any future, more concrete agreement. Mesnager sees the ruse brilliantly taking the wind out of the Whigs' sails:

It is impossible to discribe the Confusion the Whig Party were in, the Great ones, and those of the most Penetration, could make nothing of it, the Ministry denyed it with all possible Seriousness, as well they might; all the Vigilance, all the Observation, and Conjectures, all the Spies and Secret Attempts for a Discovery in this matter came to nothing: The Court was still and quiet, the Ministry appeared

busied upon other things; nor was there the least appearance of any thing of this kind; *for the truth was*, that not one Step was all this while taken in the Matter. (Mes, pp. 190-1)

The ministry have sparked the anticipated Whig outcry at the news of preliminaries, but without leaving any possible grounds for holding them responsible for this development. When they eventually make a formal announcement, any criticism will appear trite and predictable. Defoe is able to use the French agent Mesnager as a more appropriate mouthpiece for his private fascination with the indefectible manoeuvre: he makes his Machiavellian ruminations at one remove. Asked by Shrewsbury to comment on this '*last Push*' (Mes, p. 191), Mesnager responds:

My Lord ... I think it is a Master-piece, and has done more than all that ever you have said or done before; all the Confederates think you have made the Peace, I know nothing to do now, but to be so kind to them, as to convince them, that they are not mistaken: Let that be as it will, says my Lord, we have yet the Pleasure of reproaching them with injuriously charging us, when we have no Hand in any such thing, and if we bring their Predictions to pass, we only do that which they abused us for, and we cannot, I think, do them a greater piece of Justice, than to make good what they have with so much Confidence, charged us with doing. (Mes, p. 191)

Ironically, the Whigs and the allies will appear to have provided the impetus for the peace, while the ministry simply acquiesces to hearsay. This passage is noteworthy because it suggests the French and English taking a shared satisfaction in exactly the kind of polished contrivance which Defoe had first encountered in popular accounts of French court politics.

Mesnager is the ideal vehicle through which Defoe can suggest an affinity between English and French politics: something which he had fantasized about since at least 1704. What could seem more natural than for a French diplomat in London to find parallels for current English affairs in the political folklore of his own country? When Mesnager contemplates how the Duchess of Marlborough had recommended to the Queen the woman who would ultimately supplant her, Lady Masham, he remarks:

I could not refrain calling to Mind the Fate of the *Queen Mother* of *France*, in the Reign of *Lewis XIII.* who introduced to the King her Son, her Favourite the *Bishop* of *Lucon*, afterwards the famous *Cardinal Richlieu*; and who thenceforwards insinuating himself into the King's Favour upon his own Foot, became the Prime Minister of that long Reign; but was no sooner so exalted, than he became the most implacable Enemy and Persecutor of his Benefactress. (*Mes*, pp. 45-6)

But she in turn is 'laid hold of by a *subtler Agent*' (*Mes*, p. 46): Robert Harley. He exercises the same technique, entering the ministry on Godolphin's coat-tails, only to become the agent of his downfall at a later stage. Thus Oxford is also linked indirectly with Richelieu. Defoe had drawn a similar comparison in the first *White Staff* pamphlet, but through the persona of the French agent, he is able to imagine the convergence of the two courts without any risk of controversy.

Defoe's use of Mesnager's narrative for a running comparison between the English constitutional monarchy and French absolutism has been noted. What has been less recognized is the way that these discussions permit Defoe to raise surreptitiously the same question which had preoccupied him in his 1704 memorandum to Oxford: whether the English system might be receptive to elements of absolutism without appearing to undergo any transformation. This dangerous fascination of Defoe's is disguised as the prejudices of a Frenchman abroad:

It is significant to observe, how little these People differ from us in *France*, in the Effect of an absolute Monarchy... seeing by the Power of Court Artifice, the Influence of Money, and the Management of subtle Statesmen, the People are always made Tools to operate in their own Bondage; and to enthrall themselves, either to this, or that Party, or Prince, as effectually, as if the said Prince had them under his absolute Direction. (*Mes*, p. 93)

Similarly, the Queen's creation of twelve peers at Oxford's request prompts Mesnager to remark that the liberties which the English claim to have been secured by the Revolution,

to me seem'd a meer Chymera, seeing I found that Court managements were come to such a degree of Perfection in *England*, that all the Liberties they so much boasted to enjoy, were often entirely at the Mercy of their Princes, and that who ever reign'd, and whatsoever Party had the Ascendant with the Sovereign, they

never need want a Parliament to do their Business, whether the design might be to Preserve those Liberties, or to Destroy them. (*Mes*, p. 237)

Such passages might be read as warnings about the dangers of the executive interfering in Parliament. However, they explore an idea that evidently fascinated Defoe: that people will gladly submit to being exploited, providing they believe that they are still exercising their free will. In the 1704 memorandum he had discussed how a prime minister comparable to Richelieu might survive in England, without appearing to challenge its cherished system of mixed government. In *The Consolidator* he had suggested how James II might have succeeded in his designs if he had implemented them less heavy-handedly. Having Mesnager as narrator allows him to camouflage as French mockery of English self-delusion his conviction that the most authoritarian government can be established and maintained at least as successfully as in France, through a sensitive political management.

As Mesnager's reference to the creation of the twelve peers suggests, Oxford is the concrete proof that guile can furnish an English minister with authority as absolute as that possessed by the King in France. Behind the narrative mask of Mesnager, Defoe accentuates Oxford's notoriety, as he had attempted to do in earlier tracts: he is one 'who has made so much Stir in the World, and whose Fate is not yet determined' (*Mes*, p. 48). He is introduced as another exponent (after Masham) of the traditionally French manoeuvre of discarding the person through whom one first gained access to power. Mesnager toys with several possible ways in which he may have supplanted Godolphin in the Queen's favour, including the Queen's own weakness, and 'a certain *Address* peculiar to himself' (*Mes*, p. 48). Through the Frenchman, Defoe can securely hint at a parallel between Richelieu's exploitation of the ineffectual Louis XIII and Oxford's of the irresolute Queen Anne.

As in the *White Staff*, there are a number of passages exalting and appraising Oxford's political accomplishments; but now their distinctive style can be explained by the use of a French narrator, who might be expected to view court politics as a Machiavellian

spectacle. Many of the usual episodes are offered to show Oxford turning the most unpromising circumstances into occasions for political bravura, with one new addition to the repertoire:

He had a Genius for the greatest Undertakings, and a Courage equal to the boldest Attempts; an Instance of which was, the Establishing the Funds for the Debts unprovided for, and settling the *South Sea Company*; the first even against the Wills of most of the Persons to whom those Debts were due, the last against the universal Dislike of the whole Nation; both which he reduced ... But his Courage has appeared since in two Things, which his worst Enemies must acknowledge were extraordinary; *First*, his making 12 Peers at once, when he was in some Exigence in the Administration of Affairs; a Step hardly ever ventured on by any Man before him; and *lastly*, which is yet more than all the rest, his going voluntarily to the *Bastile*, (*the Tower*) and venturing himself to be tried for all those Things, by those very Men among others which have been known to be his hottest Opposers. (*Mes*, pp. 50-1)

In all these instances, it is the notion of Oxford rendering his most implacable opponents the very foundation of his designs that attracts Defoe. Oxford might not have thanked him for describing his imprisonment and forthcoming trial as if he has simply seized upon them as the pretext for a new feat of brinkmanship, but for Defoe at least, Mesnager provides a cover behind which he can indulge his political fascinations. Similarly, Mesnager dilates upon Oxford's handling of the 1710 elections:

He left no Stone unturned in the managing the Elections, after he was come into it; and that he did this so effectually, and with so much Judgment and Success, that even the *Earl of Godolphin* lost almost all the Elections in that, which was call'd *his own Country* ... and in a Word, it appeared that he had laid his Measures so true, and was served so punctually, that at the summing up of the Numbers, the Whigs saw themselves distanc'd, and out-numbered in a surprizing Manner, as to the Deputies of their lower Parliament: As to the the upper Parliament ... he had his Eye so intent upon that also, was so vigilant in taking his Advantages, and so dextrous in improving them, that he carried his Point there also. (*Mes*, pp. 92-3)

The passage recalls Defoe's reflections on Oxford's management of the Jacobites in the *White Staff*, in its attempt to estimate his manipulative skill through a rhetorical sequence of adjectives. As in the earlier secret history, Defoe's chief concern here is to describe

political genius in a specific mode of popular literature: the reader is supplied with only the barest details of the elections themselves.

Defoe can even use Mesnager to voice interpretations of Oxford's career which until now he has refrained from expressing publicly, even in the *White Staff*. Mesnager relates that before the intransigence of the Whigs forced him to turn to the Tories, Oxford had a particular plan in mind:

For his Design was to have formed a middle Party of NEUTERS, that should have acted by his Schemes, and under Direction, *as Wheels in a Watch*, perfectly passive, except *as wound up*, or *screwed down* by the Engineer, *who was to be himself*. (Mes, p. 71)

Defoe is revealing how for him there was a more extreme subtext to the principle of moderate, non-party government with which Oxford's propagandists had long sought to identify the minister. Less partisan ministers are desirable because they will conform more easily to his private designs, will allow him to be the wheel within the wheels of their decisions. But because this view is not expressed by Defoe but by Mesnager, it can be taken as the distorted perception of a foreigner accustomed to seeing Machiavellian intrigue everywhere.

However, Defoe does allow the character some individuality; Mesnager is not simply a mouthpiece for his less palatable political conceits. For Defoe recognizes that having a French agent consistently voice unqualified praise for Oxford might not work entirely in the statesman's favour. When Mesnager makes certain criticisms of Oxford's character, the reader is assured that there was a considerable gulf between the minister and the French court. In the mostly laudatory character sketch with which Mesnager introduces Oxford, the tone changes when he comes to the minister's evasiveness:

In publick Business only, he differs from himself; for there his Discourse is always reserved, communicating nothing, and allowing none to know the whole Event of what they are employed to do; his Excess of Caution makes Business hang on his Hands, and his Dispatches were thereby always both slow and imperfect; and it is

said, he scarce ever sent any Person abroad, though on Matters of the greatest Importance, but that he left some of their Business to be sent after them. (*Mes*, p. 49)

Defoe's own letters to Oxford, while on his travels around England and Scotland as a government agent, abound in similar complaints about his lack of adequate instructions and resources; but in retrospect at least, Defoe shows a keen appreciation of how Oxford adopted these characteristics to keep his tools dependent. Here, Mesnager's criticisms hint at French impatience with Oxford's inscrutability, which makes it difficult for them to ascertain his ministry's commitment to the Jacobite cause. But Mesnager's criticisms are not necessarily Defoe's: in fact, Defoe makes these apparent faults the grounds for Oxford's vindication. Whatever Mesnager considers Oxford's shortcomings become in the eyes of an English Protestant reader his redeeming virtues.

A more straightforward, reliable Tory politician, like Rochester, is more helpful to French-Jacobite designs than Oxford. Their politics contrast with Oxford's. Rochester is described as

a most punctual Observer of his Word, and free from the ordinary, *I had almost said*, necessary Qualification of a Courtier, (*viz.*) *Dissimulation*: But as this Sincerity was his peculiar, so it brought with it this Consequence, that to whom he was a Friend, he was so openly; and to whom he was an Enemy, he was so with the same Openness and without Disguise. (*Mes*, p. 75)

While his politics are less akin to French practices, they are more likely to bring about a coherent Tory ministry that will consistently serve the Pretender's interest. Rochester argues vehemently for an end to mixed government and a thorough purge of Whigs from office. Mesnager recalls him explaining to Oxford

that he lost Ground even with the Whigs themselves by it, and at the same time kept the Tories at a Distance, and in Suspence; so that they could not resolve whether to join him, or not to join him; because they could never resolve whether he would be with them or no; that this halting between two would ruin them; that they ought to declare themselves boldly and openly, their Friends would then depend upon them, and even their Enemies would own their Honesty ... Tho' it was impossible to remove Mr. *H_____* from that opiniative Value for his own

Schemes, which he had been famous for, or to leave off that trimming which has lost him so much with both Parties. (*Mes*, pp. 85-6)

Towards the end of the third *White Staff* pamphlet, Defoe had adopted the strategy of apparently criticising Oxford for having alienated all parties through his pursuit of universal support, which at least proved that he was not part of a determined Jacobite plot. Here, the view is more appropriate to Mesnager, who is clearly in sympathy with Rochester. Although he voices some of Defoe's relish for Oxford's politics, Mesnager also condemns what he sees as Oxford's perverse, fatal attachment to dilatory methods and over-elaborate artifices, which only exasperate both Whigs and Tories. And the more Mesnager condemns these traits, the more Oxford is exculpated of Jacobitism. Defoe had perhaps valued the ideal of a prime minister courting all parties, not just because it could provide a ministry with a broad foundation, but also because the minister could not be held to account for any view that one particular party might hold. He is associated with every faction and no faction.

Although Oxford is quite deliberately kept on the periphery of the negotiations, his political character is responsible for the disappointment of the French-Jacobite conspiracy. Mesnager acknowledges Oxford's political assurance, but welcomes the rumours of his recent disgrace that have reached France. The hopes of a Jacobite succession have been thwarted by Oxford's peculiar slipperiness:

If this is so, I must be content to be of their Opinion, who thought he was not so Sincere with us, as he ought to have been, and that since the Peace (*which he aim'd at for private Reasons*) is obtained, he would be for making his Court to the House of *Hanover*, at the Expence of his Mistress, and of all his Friends.
(*Mes*, pp. 184-5)

Oxford may not emerge from Mesnager's account as a particularly scrupulous minister, but he is at least unimpeachable. Later he is held responsible for the failure of the Jacobites by the 'Lady', Masham, with whom Mesnager corresponds.

I take it for granted, that they are fallen into the Hands of my Lord T_____ he loves a Secret, and is famous for making Intricacies, where there is a Sterility of

Intrigues; and no less renown'd for causing every thing of such a Nature to miscarry; if their Assurances are from him, I doubt not he values himself upon having deceived them; and if the Person to be sent to Utrecht comes from him, I dare promise you that when he comes there, he wants his Instructions ... their great Secret remains with my Lord T_____ where Secrets often Sleep and Dye.
(*Mes*, p. 310)

Both Mesnager and Masham perceive the Jacobite plot to have been scuppered almost incidentally by Oxford's political eccentricities: it is left for the reader to infer that Oxford's management of the Jacobites was actually much more calculated.

Mesnager is perhaps motivated by aims as diverse as those behind the *White Staff*, and contains notions of Oxford as risky and conflicting as those that appeared in the earlier work. But its overall impression is not one of glaring self-contradiction, and one looks in vain for any controversy in its wake. The explanation must lie in Defoe's use of Mesnager as narrator: any indiscretions or ambivalence in his presentation of Oxford or English politics generally can be explained by his narrator's French allegiances. Mesnager appraises Oxford's talent for transmuting Whig intransigence into support, as if it is worthy of comparison with the 'masterpieces' of the most celebrated ministers of his native country, but quite naturally resents his frustration of the Jacobite plot to which France has given its support. The work represents Defoe's most successful compromise between propaganda on Oxford's behalf and an exploration of his own political leanings.

Defoe interpreted the demise of the Oxford ministry as a licence to place a much greater emphasis on the individual politician in his histories than he had hitherto risked. Since Oxford's trial for treason was impending, this approach was not much less imprudent than it would have been before July 1714, at least from Oxford's point of view; Defoe had less to lose now that he was no longer a government hireling. The techniques and characteristics which Defoe had long identified with the ideal statesman could now be shown to have played their part in the political events with which he had been closely acquainted.

But Oxford was not the only available candidate for elevation into Machiavellian hero. Parts I and II of the *White Staff* suggest some political affinity between Oxford and Bolingbroke, for all their rivalry. *Mesnager* is perhaps Defoe's most dense political narrative. It is naturally dominated by the narrator himself, with his French appreciation of political intrigue, but Shrewsbury also appears as a canny player in the negotiations. Shrewsbury is the focus of attention in *Memoirs of Publick Transactions in the Life and Ministry of his Grace the D. of Shrewsbury*, a work that appeared the year after *Mesnager*, which it discusses and advertises, and that has been plausibly attributed to Defoe.

The tract shares with Defoe's accounts of Oxford's career a concern with 'Things of the nicest management', but draws a distinction between the two former ministers. Having flaunted Oxford's breathtaking political feats, while also admitting their long-term failure, Defoe now celebrates Shrewsbury's more low-key, but invariably effective manoeuvring. The figure appeals to Defoe because of the impression of durability given by his career; his talent for riding the successive political upheavals of the post-Restoration period, which makes him 'the most *successful Trimmer* that the Age has produced'. Defoe remarks that

It is an unusual thing to find him not only stand untouch'd, tho' in high Employments under them all; but that it may be said of him, that he was in the turn and return of his Fortune IN and OUT with them all, made himself be Courted and desir'd by all Parties, had it always in his power to come IN when he was OUT, and generally put himself OUT, when he was IN.

Shrewsbury consistently detaches himself from a prevailing faction when he senses that its fortunes are about to change, thus making himself an equally likely favourite with its successor. Oxford's ultimate failure, and perhaps the controversy provoked by the *White Staff's* celebration of his political capers, seem to have led Defoe to celebrate survival as a political contender and security of reputation above engrossment of power. As Defoe says of Shrewsbury towards the end of the tract: 'Safety was the height of his Ambition, and his

Ease was more than Wealth to him'.⁴⁷ His fantasy of absolute power achieved within a parliamentary system is laid aside for the present.

This conscious effort to avoid the mistakes of the *White Staff* pamphlets is signalled by Defoe's insistence that Shrewsbury was never a prime minister. Defoe makes remarks on the post and its French origins that contradict views which he expressed elsewhere both privately and publicly.

But it is most true, that he oppos'd with warmth the ambition of every Man, who seem'd but to espouse the mischievous custom of Courts, taken in usage in these late Ages, (*viz.*) of committing all Business to the agency of a *Prime Minister*; which, it has been said, is generally a Spice of Tyranny, and that of a worse kind than the Tyranny of the Prince himself; for that in particular, the Oppressions which Subjects bear from one another, are more insupportable, generally speaking, than those they bear from the Kings themselves. Thus Cardinal *Richlieu* was an absolute unsufferable Tyrant, when *Lewis XIII.* under whom he carried on the administration of Affairs, was a Prince naturally gentle and easie; and many other instances might be given from History.

But, as we have seen, it is the fact that ministers like Richelieu were able to rule like tyrants without the privileges of a monarch, meeting challenges from rival courtiers for royal favour, that so fascinates Defoe. He recognizes elsewhere that a weak monarch might provide a screen for a minister's monopolization of power. But here he endorses the very argument which he had attempted to refute in his memorandum of 1704:

Certain it is that the managing the public Affairs, without the interposition of Favourites, has always been the most acceptable to the People of *England*, and the most suitable to an uninterrupted course of the public Justice; and perhaps in the main, had been the best even for the Ministers themselves; who having a free access in all Cases to the King, and laying every thing before him, are less liable to the censures of the People, and to the Envy and Intrigue of one another.⁴⁸

Instead of lamenting the tactlessness of English favourites, Defoe dismisses them as a hindrance to the smooth administration of the country. There is no mention of methods by

⁴⁷ *Memoirs of Publick Transactions in the Life and Ministry of his Grace the Duke of Shrewsbury* (London: Tho. Warner, 1718), pp. 1, 118, 4-5, 120.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 33, 34-5.

which a favourite might manipulate popular favour or exploit political divisions to his own advantage. Defoe has clearly decided on a portrait of Shrewsbury that differs markedly from that of Oxford, while still exploring congenial ideas.

Shrewsbury's distaste for the intrepid political ventures which Defoe has associated with Oxford is the secret of his staying-power. By avoiding such conspicuous attempts at self-preservation, Shrewsbury is, paradoxically, serving his interest all the more effectively. In the Restoration court, he evades both the Catholic and Protestant factions that were emerging around the Duke of York and Duke of Monmouth respectively. While this makes his position at the time somewhat uncomfortable, it serves him well on King William's accession. When Defoe comes later to Oxford's manipulation of Jacobites, Shrewsbury is seen as characteristically aloof from such a hazardous policy:

He steer'd clear of all dangerous Shoars, and it was his Peculiar on all the occasions of Turns and Revolutions, as well as those mentioned, as others well known, That he was often consulted as the Oracle of Council, and would go along with his own Councils as far as they went on chearfully. But he avoided Embarking; and it was this *Italian* fineness in his Temper, that made him decline all the great Posts which might embarrass him too much, or make him go farther than he could retreat ... The greatest wonder to me, in all his Measures of this kind, was, that in this unalterable State of Indolence he should be valued at all by any Party; either on one Side, or on the other: whereas, on the contrary, he manag'd himself with so much address, that he was valu'd for his Council by every Side, tho' at the same time he would never embark far in the best thing he ever advis'd to; and that if they came to any Difficulties, he was, as before, not to be depended upon.⁴⁹

Shrewsbury eschews Oxford's audacity, but displays a 'management' that is at least as ingenious as Oxford's and ultimately more successful. His talent is for taking a leading role in government, but extricating himself when his participation threatens to jeopardize his political reputation. He formulates policies, but then detaches himself cleanly from their execution and consequences. He takes credit for a ministry's measures if they succeed, while not appearing to be responsible for them if they fail. His ostensible lack of ambition

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 53-4.

masks a shrewd perception of how best to sustain his popularity, of when to withdraw from government. It is a less controversial portrait than that of Oxford in the *White Staff*, but equally Machiavellian.

The opportunity that arose after August 1714 to treat the politics of Queen Anne's reign, and of the four years of the Oxford ministry in particular, as the malleable raw material of historiography, had a significant bearing on Defoe's evolution as a writer. It encouraged him to place individual politicians such as Oxford and Shrewsbury at the centre of his political writing, using them as models for the practices which had earlier been identified with the most infamous statesmen of the previous century. Defoe eagerly attempted to replicate and accelerate the process whereby Richelieu, Mazarin and Cromwell had been mythologized in the years following their deaths. In *Mesnager* he created a narrator who is naturally inclined to discuss and appraise political machinations, even when these have been perpetrated by his opponents. All these features anticipate his later novels. But completely fictional protagonists were to provide him with the most flexible means of formulating his privately cherished Machiavellian ideals.

CHAPTER FOUR

Crusoe's Reasons of State.

This cost me as much Thought as a Statesman would have bestow'd upon a grand Point of Politicks. (*RC*, p. 82)

The most commercial political manuals, as I have shown, tended to imply in their prefaces that their maxims were not just applicable to political affairs, but to human transactions of all kinds. Defoe's writing increasingly betrays a similar tendency to make the political attributes which he had valued in, for example, his memorandum to Oxford, the basis for a more general philosophy of survival in the modern world. Many of Defoe's rhetorical tirades against the 'innumerable Crafts, Subtleties, Tricks, Cheats and Contrivances of Men, to amuse, abuse, and impose upon one another', which appear with growing frequency towards the end of the *Review*'s run, can be taken as referring to all forms of public life, not just politics or trade.¹

There is a passage in *The Political History of the Devil* which suggests how the kind of elaborate manoeuvring which had once been inseparable from a political context has been expanded into a more general form of behaviour which the reader can follow.

I cannot but observe here, that I think this Part of the *Devil's* Story very entertaining, because of the great Variety of Incidents which appear in every Part of it; sometimes he is like a hunted Fox, curvetting and counter-hunting to avoid his being pursued and found out, while at the same time he is carrying on his secret Designs to draw the People he pretends to manage, into some Snare or other to their Hurt; at another time ... like a Monkey that has done Mischief, and who making his own Escape sits and chatters at a Distance, as if he had triumph'd in what he had done ... His indefatigable Vigilance is, on the other hand, a useful Caveat, as well as an improving View to us; no sooner is he routed and expos'd, defeated and disappointed in one Enterprize, but he begins another, and, like a

¹ *Review*, VIII, 193a.

cunning Gladiator, warily defends himself, and boldly attacks his Enemy at the same time.²

The tone is necessarily disapproving, as it is the Devil's circumvention of Man that is being described, but an element of the popular manual enters the account towards the end. What was originally the politician's talent for insuring against any challenge to his authority, while also subverting the designs of his rivals, is now stripped of particular circumstances and offered for emulation. This process is at the heart of Defoe's transition from political journalism to fiction.

Robinson Crusoe was written at a time when Defoe was perhaps still preoccupied with the Oxford years and the style of politics with which he had identified the minister: it must have been composed only months after *Memoirs of Publick Transactions*. It should not surprise us to find the novel illustrating the value of certain Machiavellian skills, literalizing metaphors that Defoe had once associated largely with political matters, and even exploring his most dangerous political fantasies. *Crusoe* is partly a survival manual; but one that derives from Defoe's interest in political means and ends.

Charles Gildon, in his attack on *Crusoe*, *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of D_____ De F___*, treats the novel much as if it were just another Grub Street polemic, indistinguishable from Defoe's earlier tracts. This may be because, as Lennard Davis has suggested, Gildon has not comprehended the recent emergence of the novel as a literary form in its own right from a more general 'news/novels' discourse: Gildon rather anachronistically complains that *Crusoe* takes liberties with facts.³ But as a contemporary of Defoe, Gildon is in a more advantageous position from which to perceive the origins of the novel in its author's politics than the modern critic. He confidently detects in the character of *Crusoe* some of Defoe's own taste for resourceful opportunism.

² *The Political History of the Devil*, pp. 169-70.

³ Lennard Davis, *Factual Fictions* (Guildford, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1983), pp. 157-60.

In the 'Dialogue' between the author and his characters, he has Defoe account for the respect shown for Catholicism in the novel, in a manner that suggests how Defoe's own experience and outlook is the blueprint for *Crusoe's* life:

First, you must know, that by speaking favourably of Popery, I lay up a Friend in a Corner, and make all of that Religion favourable to me and what I write; and should the Fox Hunters prevail, that Religion must be the Mode; if it never does, I at least pass for a Moderate Man both with the Papists and Protestant Fox Hunters ... By this Ramble thro' all Religions, I shall be thoroughly qualified for whatever Side may come uppermost, whether the *Spanish* Inquisition, the Janesaries of *Mecca*, or any other Propagators of particular Religions.⁴

Although the substance of the charge implicit in the passage is plainly ridiculous, Gildon has mimicked quite accurately the kind of boast that appears, for example, in Defoe's private accounts of his activities as an undercover agent in Scotland. The passage describes the skill at convincing diverse parties that you are acting in their interest, a manoeuvre which Defoe indeed relished. I would suggest that Gildon was closer to the mark than he probably realized, when he used *Crusoe* as the basis for an attack on Defoe's politics and morals. For the author's fascination with the calculation of political stratagems, often of an underhand, manipulative nature, informs much of the novel.

It was perhaps from a similar sense of the novel's original context that the view that the author of *Crusoe* was not Defoe but Oxford, which we now rightly dismiss as eccentric, gained limited currency during the nineteenth century.⁵ However, there is a grain of sense in this attribution, if internal evidence were considered enough. *Crusoe's* conduct does bear some resemblance to Oxford's, at least as he had appeared in Defoe's quasi-fictional accounts of his ministerial career. The slippery adaptability which Gildon

⁴ [Gildon], pp. xiv-xvi.

⁵ See Walter Wilson, *Memoirs of the Life and Times of Daniel De Foe*, 3 vols (London: Hurst, Chance & Co., 1830), III, 458; W. Laidlaw Purves, *The Authorship of Robinson Crusoe* (London: The Athenaeum, 1903).

seized upon as a link between Crusoe and his creator had been the signal characteristic bestowed upon Oxford by Defoe in these secret histories.

J. Paul Hunter and G.A. Starr have both argued that the very fabric of the narrative embodies the familiar imagery of Puritan guides and sermons, particularly that of seafaring, shipwreck and husbandry.

His punishment, like other significant developments in *Robinson Crusoe*, converts a fundamental religious metaphor into the specifics of experience, achieving a peculiar unity of physical and spiritual levels.

Motifs employed constantly in spiritual autobiographies and practical works for their illustrative or metaphorical value are woven into the actual, outward narrative of *Robinson Crusoe*, yet seem to retain their conventional significance.⁶

These comments are fine as far as they go, but their concentration on the Puritan tradition tends to obscure the fact that these metaphors could be found in other contexts. As Ian Bell has remarked:

The idea that the books are spiritual autobiography and confessional tale has been translated into the view that the books *are* spiritual autobiographies or confessional tales. Such a view privileges certain episodes over others, and the narrative does not invite such selectivity.

I share Bell's view that Defoe's fiction is above all 'generically compendious', resisting a single interpretation.⁷ *Crusoe* accomodates a number of overlapping (and occasionally conflicting) sources, of which the Puritan idea of spiritual progress is but one example. Another, which has received less critical attention, is the political manual and commentary. It is not my intention to argue for *Crusoe*'s political origins at the expense of those

⁶ J. Paul Hunter, *The Reluctant Pilgrim* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1966), p. 143; G.A. Starr, *Defoe & Spiritual Autobiography* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 92. For the metaphor of the sea journey in particular in Puritan literature, see Hunter, pp. 106-8, 200; Starr, *Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography*, pp. 29, 92-6.

⁷ Bell, *Defoe's Fiction*, pp. 110-11, 96.

identified by Hunter and Starr: only to show that there is a political subtext to the novel and that it is more pervasive than has yet been recognized.

The novel was able to be so compendious because popular literary genres were so compatible thematically. Religious and political tracts both used the idea of the sea journey through hazardous waters to instruct the reader in fundamentally similar virtues: in one case an alertness to divine Providence, and in the other, belief in the importance of a secular providence in those governing a state. The 'ship of state' had been a common metaphor in political writing since classical times. The notion of the lone pilot keeping the vessel intact and afloat through a combination of foresight and improvisation until it reaches the security of the harbour was particularly apt for the political manual. Philippe de Béthune offers a good example:

It is not sufficient to build a strong ship to make a long and tedious Voyage; but we must withall provide a good Pilot to governe it, and to seeke meanes to calke it, and trim it when it takes water, and to be able to resist the waves of the Sea, and the violence of the Winds and stormes without shipwracke.⁸

Part of the image's appeal for a readership of would-be politicians lies in its assumption that a strong state depends upon the supervision of a talented individual.

The idea of a sea journey would have suggested the 'ship of state' for Defoe at least as much as the progress of the soul. In the *Review* in particular, he frequently invokes the metaphor in a political context, taking pleasure in putting a new twist on it each time. Generally, he uses it to suggest the perilous, unpredictable nature of political life, the near-impossibility of survival in such turbulent conditions. In one issue in 1711, he describes the scenario that usually follows the attempts of high-fliers to gain access to the ministry:

The Wind of Ambition rises immediately, People fall in to Parties, the Court breezes blow *here Gently*, which we call Favour, *there Fiercely*, which we call Resentment; *the Country Gale then rises*, which *always blows hard* upon the Court, and often Shipwrecks *Favourites* upon the Lee Shoar of their own

⁸ Béthune, pp. 239-40.

Designs, sometimes it Splits Men upon the Rocks of their Ambition, and sometimes, by shifting and turning to Windward to avoid the Ruin they foresee, they run themselves aground on the Sands and Shoals of Time-serving and Compliance.

Here, Defoe is referring to politicians of a creed he despised, but the dilemma of self-preservation amidst so many potential enemies was an endless source of fascination to him. After this passage, he goes on to commend the man who perseveres through the storm, sometimes foundering, but still resourcefully set on survival: 'Honest Men always venture to Ride out the Storm'.⁹

Defoe could also view the metaphor from a different perspective, identifying the sea with party politics, and the rocks and shore with the constitution and government designed to contain these waters.

But its Nature being fluid, its Particles easily separated, the least aggression of Wind puts it into Motion. If the Winds blow hard, that Motion encreases, and in proportion to the force of those Winds, all those Smiles of the Ocean's Face are soon turn'd into Wrinkles and Frowns: Again, if that Violence encrease to a Storm, but especially if it blows from several Quarters at once, if the Wind and Tide meet, *or* the Storm blows against a strong Current of the Waters ... a raging Madness seems to possess the Water, and the Waves dash not only against the impenetrable Rocks, and the Shoars, that are set for its eternal Bounds, but, as if rais'd up to Lunacy and Madness, and bent upon self-Destruction, they dash one against another till they spend themselves into Foam and Froath, and sink down under the weight of their own Disorder.

Defoe transforms a hackneyed figure of speech into an elaborate representation of the party strife which forms the backdrop to any ministry's attempts to govern. The sea is a particularly serviceable metaphor for the fickle, fractious political population, because they too are 'by Nature fluctuating, and easily, *like the Particles of the Water*, separated from one another'. Winds and squalls can be linked with the particular factions who seek to recruit and divide the people. The cumulating waves can suggest graphically the violent passions of contending parties, that result only in ineffectual, self-defeating 'Froath and

⁹ *Review*, VII, 503b.

Foam'. Above all, much is made of the sea's capacity to be excitable one moment, but placid the next 'when just Authority shines upon them with healing and protecting Influences'.¹⁰

Defoe could even apply the metaphor to his own plight as author, as he negotiated the question of the Spanish succession during 1711, required by Oxford to prime the public for the shock of Swift's *The Conduct of the Allies* and the ministry's willingness to see a peace 'without Spain':

I am enter'd upon a large Field, and difficult to move in; Launch'd out into a vast Ocean full of Rocks and Shoals, and full of Variety of Dangers: *Party-Pirates* and Storms of Strife, disturb the Surface; and if I fall upon *High-Church* Rocks, or *Low-Church* Shoals, my Arguments may suffer Shipwrack on both Hands, I'll steer as steady as I can, if I get safe through, without Reproach, Cavil, and Exception, it will be strange.¹¹

Here, Defoe applies to himself the kind of imagery which he more often identifies with the very politician requiring him to defend this change in policy.

My point is not that Defoe only used the imagery of seafaring and shipwreck in a political context, merely that it did have strong political associations for him. As Defoe begins to expand his original political ideals of anticipation and the delicate negotiation of challenges and obstacles, encapsulated in the 'ship of state' metaphor, into a more general set of values, such imagery naturally appears in a greater variety of contexts. He introduces *The Complete English Tradesman* with this promise to the reader:

Here he will be *effectually*, *we hope*, encourag'd to set out well, to begin wisely and prudently, and to avoid all those rocks which the gay race of tradesmen so frequently suffer shipwrack upon; and here he will have a true plan of his own prosperity drawn out for him.

The manual will teach the young tradesman the statesman's skill of evading dangers to his security before they appear, rather than reacting to them when they occur. What was once

¹⁰ *Review*, [IX], 187a-b, 187b, 188a, 187b.

¹¹ *Review*, VIII, 353a.

primarily a political metaphor for Defoe has become a generalization about the precariousness of modern life and the necessity of vigilance, self-sufficiency, even cunning, if any lasting prosperity is to be achieved. Interestingly, this gives way to a more literal understanding of these terms, as he condemns the trend among tradesmen for keeping ships and aspiring to being merchant adventurers. He warns them 'not to launch out in adventures beyond the compass of their stock'.¹² The act of setting out to sea without preparation illustrates imprudence both literally and figuratively.

Crusoe's refusal to heed the dangers inherent in travelling by sea is not just an indication of spiritual weakness, but of his deficiency in the qualities of foresight and tact which Defoe has earlier associated with the ideal statesman. His inevitable shipwreck recalls the swift demise of politicians who fail to learn the advantages of precaution over reaction. Later, seamen are described generally as 'perhaps the least of all Mankind given to fore-thought' (*RC*, p. 253), but Crusoe is even worse in that he travels as a gentleman rather than a member of the crew, acquiring few navigatory skills on his voyages. After his first experience of sea-sickness, he perceives the sea's changeability, 'looking with Wonder upon the Sea that was so rough and terrible the Day before, and could be so calm and so pleasant in so little time after' (*RC*, p. 9). But he has not yet learnt to anticipate rather than trail behind vicissitudes. Defoe, in typically unmethodical fashion, does show Crusoe developing some strategic ingenuity in his escape with the boy Xury from slavery under a Turkish master (which I shall discuss later), and rather spoils the impression of his persistent imprudence culminating in inevitable disaster. But the shipwreck nevertheless represents the consequences of ignoring the instability and jeopardy affecting all human

¹² *The Compleat English Tradesman*, vol. I (London: Charles Rivington, 1727), pp. ix, xi. Novak sees a connection between *Crusoe* and Defoe's strong views on the tradesman's vocation: see *Economics and the Fiction of Daniel Defoe* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962), pp. 40-3.

enterprises, represented by the sea and climate, and the need to build up means of counteracting these conditions.

If Crusoe develops as a character, it is not a gradual or subtle process. Immediately on finding himself in the water, he acquires an impressive resourcefulness. The drowning man had been another common metaphor in Defoe's political journalism, suggesting how in desperate circumstances both factions and ministries will not scruple to use any means at hand to ensure their survival. In the *Review*, Defoe uses it to suggest that any alliance which a ministry makes in the interests of the state at a time of war is excusable:

A Man drowning will never ask, whether the Unsanctify'd Hands of a *Mahometan*, or a *Jew*, or a *Christian*, are stretch'd out to save him; 'tis the Hand of God does the Work, tho' the Paw of the Devil were the Instrument.

He seems to have in mind the Oxford ministry's accommodation of high-fliers as a means of consolidating their authority. At the beginning of part II of the *White Staff*, while setting Oxford's fate in a historical context, Defoe remarks on Charles I's temporary attempt to exploit Catholic ambition to his advantage:

As a Man drowning, accepts of the Help of the worst Enemy he has, to pull him out of the Water, it is not to be expected he should ask him what Religion he is of, or whether he has not some ill Design upon him in saving his Life.¹³

Defoe was fascinated by this temporary waiving of political principle out of an urgent need for self-preservation, and by the challenge of coming off the better from such a pact.

But while Defoe uses the simile of drowning primarily in a political context during Queen Anne's reign, it becomes equally appropriate for other walks of life. In the *Compleat English Tradesman*, the image is used to suggest the poor tradesman's struggle to make ends meet:

The shifts and turns, the projects and contrivances tradesmen are driven to by the necessity of their circumstances to get out of those straits and difficulties; which tho' they are not always successful ... yet as some times they do succeed, and at

¹³ *Review*, VII, 565b-566a; *WS*, II, 6-7.

least do extricate him out of the immediate difficulty that presses and pinches him at that time, he thinks all the rest worth venturing; as a man drowning in the sea will land, and get on shore upon the Coast, that is before him, tho' he knows it to be an uninhabited island, where he is almost sure to perish ... But the matter is, while he is swimming the water is at his mouth, if he does not make the land, or stretch out his limbs a few more strokes he sinks and drowns that very moment: On the shore he may die, but here he must, here he sees immediate destruction, there he sees immediate life; what if it be but the delay of a few hours, 'tis better in prospect than sinking that moment into the Sea.¹⁴

The passage reveals the connotations which Crusoe's struggle to reach the shore would have had for Defoe. It represents the desperate recourse to manoeuvres that may be unscrupulous or ineffectual, but are justified by the immediate need to survive. Originally, it had denoted the backstairs deals resorted to by politicians to keep themselves in power, but has gradually come to signify other attempts to attain a brief security.

Defoe's description of Crusoe's efforts to reach the shore, where he can be 'free from Danger, and quite out of the Reach of the Water' (*RC*, p. 46) abounds in figurative suggestions of just such a frantically acquired expediency. The style alone seems to register the sudden emergence of a more deliberative Crusoe:

I had so much Presence of Mind as well as Breath left, that seeing myself nearer the main Land than I expected, I got upon my Feet, and endeavoured to make on towards the Land as fast as I could, before another Wave should return, and take me up again. But I soon found it was impossible to avoid it; for I saw the Sea come after me as high as a great Hill, and as furious as an Enemy which I had no Means or Strength to contend with; my Business was to hold my Breath, and raise my self upon the Water, if I could; and so by swimming to preserve my Breathing, and Pilot my self towards the Shore, if possible; my greatest Concern now being, that the Sea, as it would carry me a great Way towards the Shore when it came on, might not carry me back again with it when it gave back towards the Sea. (*RC*, pp. 44-5)

The act of holding his breath to combat the engulfing waves suggests his ability to temporize to survive, ultimately outwitting a far superior force. He recognizes the importance of making the most of whatever his circumstances have to offer, as he

¹⁴ *The Compleat English Tradesman*, vol. I, Supplement, pp. 2-3.

scrambles towards the shore while the tide is in his favour, then braces himself for its attempts to drag him backwards. What were once particular political techniques, drawn from Machiavellian literature, have now been broadened into a general 'Presence of Mind' available to all who face threats and dangers.

If Crusoe suddenly acquires this talent for opportunism in the water, by the time he is settled on land it has almost become an obsession. His determination to salvage everything potentially useful from the wreck of the ship, even down to its very structure, projects a general confidence that he can turn even the most adverse fate to his advantage. As he records in the journal that appears later in the narrative,

as I had learn'd not to despair of any Thing, I resolv'd to pull every Thing to Pieces that I could of the Ship, concluding, that every Thing I could get from her would be of some Use or other to me. (*RC*, p. 84)

When he wakes up one morning after a storm to find that what remained of the ship has sunk, he is at pains to reassure himself that he has not squandered the slightest opportunity to retrieve more materials from the wreck.

I was a little surpriz'd, but recover'd my self with this satisfactory Reflection, viz. That I had lost no time, nor abated no Dilligence to get every thing out of her that could be useful to me, and that indeed there was little left in her that I was able to bring away if I had had more time. (*RC*, pp. 57-8)

This private pleasure in his capacity for exploiting a situation to the full resonates throughout the narrative. It also accords with one of the novel's Puritan themes: the mercifulness of Providence in always providing some source of hope amidst every misfortune. Crusoe observes, at various points in the text,

How frequently in the Course of our Lives, the Evil which in it self we seek most to shun, and which when we are fallen into it, is the most dreadful to us, is oftentimes the very Means or Door of our Deliverance, by which alone we can be rais'd again from the Affliction we are fallen into. (*RC*, p. 181)

But the novel's eclecticism also allows for a more secular interpretation of these statements. By accepting his adverse circumstances, and beginning to make these the

foundation of a security and authority from which he will eventually be able to plot his deliverance from the island, Crusoe is far more successful than if he had spent all his time mourning his fate. To a large extent, it is Crusoe's own initiative that miraculously transmutes his predicament into his triumph. Here, the lesson of alertness to the workings of Providence dovetails conveniently with the theme of Crusoe's acquisition of a tactical intelligence.¹⁵

At the heart of Crusoe's sudden transformation of character is his ability to weigh up alternative measures and devise the means of a long-term security. Having rejected 'all the good Counsel of my Parents' (*RC*, p. 8) at the start, he must now fall back upon his own mental initiative and call 'a Council ... in my Thoughts' (*RC*, p. 54). His experiences on the island underline the importance of anticipation. The fiasco over the canoe which he painstakingly builds, then is unable to transport into the sea, serves to define prudence. It is as much about thinking ahead and forestalling any obstacles that may arise, as tackling the difficulties that confront him immediately. Crusoe displays much invention in making the vessel, and even in his attempts to get it afloat, by digging a canal leading to a creek: 'But when this was work'd through, and this Difficulty manag'd, it was still much at one; for I could no more stir the *Canoe*, than I could the other Boat' (*RC*, p. 127). No amount of practical skill can compensate for a failure to perceive future crises. The moral he draws from the episode is 'the Folly of beginning a Work before we count the Cost; and before we judge rightly of our own Strength to go through with it' (*RC*, p. 128). In this context, Crusoe's paranoia almost from his arrival on the island is a kind of virtue. The outbreak of thunder and lightning, or the appearance of the human footprint confirm him in his

¹⁵ John Richetti sees a parallel between Providence and Crusoe himself, as he 'converts disaster and accident into fortune and plan': see *Defoe's Narratives* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 40. Michael Seidel remarks that 'His mind is much like the double-entry bookkeeping chart he produces after his arrival on the island. For every deficit there is a benefit. The trick in life is to set the balance in one's favour': *Robinson Crusoe* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), p. 104.

conviction that there are always dangers and disasters waiting to happen. After the appearance of the footprint, he meditates on the nature of fear, on how

Fear of Danger is ten thousand Times more terrifying than Danger it self, when apparent to the Eyes; and we find the Burthen of Anxiety greater by much, than the Evil which we are anxious about. (*RC*, p. 159)

In this passage, Crusoe tends to ridicule his neurosis, implying that a renewed resignation to divine Providence would have been more beneficial. But a superfluous circumspection has motivated many of his most ingenious contrivances so far, especially his over-elaborate fortifications.

Crusoe's practical accomplishments on the island body forth this new-found tactical acumen. For example, he develops the knack of dividing his stores to reduce the chances of them being destroyed. The appearance of lightning causes him to concentrate on making

Bags and Boxes to separate the Powder, and keep it a little and a little in a Parcel, in hope, that whatever might come, it might not all take Fire at once, and to keep it so apart that it should not be possible to make one part fire another.
(*RC*, pp. 60-1)

In the journal he similarly records how 'I stow'd it in Places as secure and remote from one another as possible' (*RC*, p. 73). The practice basically employs the same strategy as the divide-and-rule politics that Defoe had once privately recommended to Oxford. By dividing the powder, Crusoe's possession over it is likely to be more secure, just as Defoe had suggested that the Whigs could be 'Mannag'd' because they were 'Easy Too be Divided'.¹⁶ Similarly, when he later decides to sow the few ears of barley and rice he has, it occurs to him that he does not know what time of the year will be most suitable for planting. So he only sows two-thirds of the grain, and when this fails to grow, he is able to search for more fertile ground for the remaining third. He claims that 'by this Experiment I was made Master of my Business' (*RC*, p. 105). The narrative contains many such

¹⁶ *Letters*, p. 68.

examples of Crusoe dividing and rationing as a method of keeping tabs on the materials from which he has to cobble together the means of survival. His need to maintain the normal division of time into days and months, or to break down his welter of experiences on the island into distinct entries in his journal involve the same tactic.

A faint echo of Defoe's Machiavellian ideals is detectable in many of Crusoe's artefacts. Finding himself without certain utensils, he makes do with ingeniously fashioned approximations to these, that will tide him over until he is rescued. Instead of the 'fine thin Canvas' which would be ideal for making sieves, he uses 'some Neckcloths of Callicoe, or Muslin' to construct three small attempts at a sieve, that are 'proper enough for the Work' (RC, pp. 122-3). His handiwork objectifies the same policy adopted by a statesman like Oxford, who relies on unholy, makeshift alliances with political rivals to shore up his ministry until the hostility of the opposing party abates. Like Defoe's political secret histories, *Crusoe* evinces a fascination with the way its protagonist conceives competent remedies to seemingly insuperable difficulties.¹⁷

Crusoe's delight in hatching elaborate security measures is best incarnated in his construction of intricate fortifications, an enthusiasm that comes close to rivalling Uncle Toby's hobby-horse in *Tristram Shandy*. This is another example of a metaphor which Defoe had previously applied to political matters being acted out literally by Crusoe. In an issue of the *Review* in 1712, shortly after the Whig Lords had conceded the passage of the Occasional Conformity Bill, in return for the support of Nottingham's Tory faction for the motion of 'no peace without Spain', Defoe considers:

How the *Dissenters* shall bring Good out of Evil; how they shall make the late *Occasional Bill* turn to their Advantage, and ... cause it to turn to the Destruction of that *Haman*, the *High Tory Party* that contriv'd it, or to the Confusion of those *False Brethren* that gave them up as a Sacrifice.

¹⁷ For the view that Crusoe's activities reflect the basic values of diligence and industry admired by Defoe, see Novak, *Economics and the Fiction of Daniel Defoe*, pp. 50-1; Curtis, *The Elusive Daniel Defoe*, p. 62.

The Dissenters' plight is not dissimilar to Crusoe's own: he draws up a credit\debit account of his circumstances on the island, and concludes that even in the most desperate situation, 'we may always find in it something to comfort ourselves from, and to set in the Description of Good and Evil, on the Credit Side of the Accompt'. Crusoe repeatedly converts his misfortune into his gain, as he recreates the trappings of civilized life from the imperfect materials at his disposal. The solution which Defoe offers to the disfranchised Dissenters is to revert to a siege mentality:

In their Politick Circumstances ... like a Resolute Garrison, *the Outworks and Palisadoes of their Fortification being taken*, they retire within the Body of the Place, make *Coupres, Retrenchments, and Barricadoes* within, as the last Refuge, resolving to maintain themselves there, till Relief comes, or the Enemy, weakened by their furious and unskilful Attacks, grow faint in their pushing on the Siege, and then they sally out, and recover their Out-works again.¹⁸

Defoe is voicing what had consistently been his line on the Dissenters (in public, at least): that they should attend more to unity and the unobtrusive consolidation of their strength than the pursuit of public office. But what concerns us here is his choice of imagery. For Crusoe constructs just such a fort, allowing him to retreat behind its outer ramparts at moments when he feels most under threat. Crusoe's obsession with amplifying and reduplicating his fortifications springs from Defoe's peculiar fascination with how an interest (political or otherwise) might be reinforced and entrenched against the claims of other interests.

Most readers of the book are struck by the amount of space apportioned by Defoe to meticulous descriptions of Crusoe's fortifications. The recapitulation of these activities, as well as the introduction of new details, in Crusoe's journal increases the sense that this

¹⁸ *Review*, VIII, 709a, 710a. Curtis draws attention to the *Review* passage in her discussion of the imagery of entrenchment in Defoe's writing: see *The Elusive Daniel Defoe*, pp. 21, 67, 74-5. On the political connotations of hedges, walls and fences, see Schonhorn, p. 143. For more general remarks on Defoe's use of such imagery, see Birdsall, pp. 40-1; Seidel, pp. 55-6; Everett Zimmerman, *Defoe and the Novel* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1975), p. 32.

obsession is outgrowing his actual needs. At one point in the journal, Defoe seems conscious of this impression, interjecting the assurance: '*This Wall being describ'd before, I purposely omit what was said in the Journal*' (RC, p. 76). But he still lingers over the amount of time spent '*working, finishing, and perfecting this Wall*' (RC, p. 76). It is in fact Crusoe's account of the motives behind these ever-expanding constructions, and of the effects achieved, which is always most interesting. He remarks in the journal about the turf wall with which he reinforces the fence to his main fort: 'I thought I should never be perfectly secure 'till this Wall was finish'd' (RC, p. 76). Crusoe is constantly striving to 'perfect' his designs, aspiring to an absolute security. He describes it as 'a compleat Enclosure' (RC, p. 79) and 'a perfect Settlement' (RC, p. 111). His aesthetic satisfaction in the construction is always dependent upon its degree of impenetrability.

In the same part of the journal, he goes on to reveal that the wall is intended not only to fortify but to conceal the tent:

When this Wall was finished, and the Out-side double-fenc'd with a Turff-Wall rais'd up close to it, I perswaded my self, that if any People were to come on Shore there, they would not perceive any Thing like a Habitation. (RC, p. 76)

Crusoe wants the freedom to extend and complicate his fortifications without the appearance of doing so. It is not just his tent that is being screened by the wall from any invaders, but the whole impression of resistance. What was an obviously man-made fence is beginning to appear like a more natural, fortuitous obstacle. The process is completed later, when Crusoe adds two rows of stakes, of a kind which grow rapidly into trees, outside his wall:

They grew presently, and were at first a fine Cover to my Habitation, and afterward served for a Defence also. (RC, p. 106)

What is in reality another layer of protection for Crusoe can be passed off as a 'Hedge'. But this is by no means the final screen to his abode. In the wake of discovering the human

footprint, he not only shores up the outer wall of trees with earth, but plants about twenty thousand more stakes at a slight distance in front of the wall:

leaving a pretty large Space between them and my Wall, that I might have room to see an Enemy, and they might have no shelter from the young Trees, if they attempted to approach my outer Wall ... Thus in two Years Time I had a thick Grove and in five or six Years Time I had a Wood before my Dwelling, growing so monstrous thick and strong, that it was indeed perfectly impassable; and no Men of what kind soever, would ever imagine that there was any Thing beyond it, much less a Habitation. (RC, p. 161)

The space between this wood and his outer wall allows him to spy upon any invaders, while they are unaware of his presence behind the wood. Crusoe's fortifications model the inscrutable management, the combination of precaution and manipulation, which Defoe had once prescribed as the means to political security. Each additional wall puts Crusoe at one more remove from potential enemies. He can monitor their movements at a distance, without fear of exposure.¹⁹

The same tactics underlie other aspects of his home. At the start he decides that the access to his tent should be

not by a Door, but by a short Ladder to go over the Top, which Ladder, when I was in, I lifted over after me, and so I was compleatly fenc'd in, and fortify'd, as I thought, from all the World, and consequently slept secure in the Night. (RC, p. 59)

This portable entrance to the compound is available only to Crusoe. It puts him at yet one more advantage over any trespasser. As he remarks later in the journal, 'nothing could come at me from without, unless it could first mount my Wall' (RC, p. 79). He replicates the device when he comes to build his country 'Bower' on the other side of the island. But Crusoe's enthusiasm for burrowing into his cave leads him to spoil this effect of near-absolute impermeability. He works sideways through the rock, and then out again, 'and made me a Door to come out, on the Out-side of my Pale or Fortification' (RC, p. 67).

¹⁹ For Crusoe's use of camouflage, see Curtis, *The Elusive Daniel Defoe*, pp. 161-2, 173; Seidel, p. 60.

While this is a secret 'back Way' (*RC*, p. 67) to Crusoe's storehouse and tent, known only to him (as well as being slightly redolent of Defoe's relish for 'back-door' politics), it does undermine the efficiency of his wall. In his account of this moment in the journal, he is more honest about the misgivings that he felt on completing this permanent entrance:

but I was not perfectly easy at lying so open; for as I had manag'd my self before, I was in a perfect Enclosure, whereas now I thought I lay expos'd, and open for any Thing to come in upon me. (*RC*, p. 103)

It is an indication of how Crusoe's elaboration of his fort can verge on the gratuitous, bearing little relation to the goal of a flawless security. This regret at having marred the original effect perhaps underpins his later decision to create the dense surrounding wood, which 'left no Avenue' (*RC*, p. 161), and to reintroduce a system of ladders:

it was by setting two Ladders, one to a Part of the Rock which was low, and then broke in, and left room to place another Ladder upon that; so when the two Ladders were taken down, no Man living could come down to me without mischieving himself; and if they had come down, they were still on the Out-side of my outer Wall. (*RC*, pp. 161-2)

This is a reassuring return to the situation where the means of access are only in his hands; and the series of fences is fully effective, ensuring that even if someone breaches the wood, Crusoe remains at a distance from them.

Crusoe's interior design also recalls political strategies that had interested Defoe.

Initially, he makes

a large Tent, which, to preserve me from the Rains that in one Part of the Year are very violent there, I made double, viz. One smaller Tent within, and one larger Tent above it. (*RC*, pp. 59-60)

This has a clear practical purpose, but his tendency to redouble each means of protection can seem to arise from a more self-indulgent attachment to such methods, reflecting Defoe's own fascination with complicated patterns of political intrigue. He digs into the rock behind his tent, so that it becomes, as he puts it in the journal, 'a Warehouse or Magazin, a Kitchen, a Dining-room, and a Cellar' (*RC*, p. 74). The fear that he has dug too

deeply into the hill, as earth collapses into his cave, gives him the pretext for dividing it. The posts which he sets up to support a ceiling of boards, 'standing in Rows, serv'd me for Partitions to part of my House' (*RC*, p. 75). Later he describes how the cave has evolved into 'several Apartments, or Caves, one within another' (*RC*, p. 151). It is not impertinent to recall here Defoe's proposals to Oxford for 'an Inner Cabinett', to which the Privy Council will serve as a constitutional front.²⁰ Crusoe's fort similarly contains rooms within rooms, keeping Crusoe and his provisions securely remote from any intruders, mystifying his authority over the island. Typically, when he comes to build enclosures for his goats, he takes pleasure in filling them 'with little Pens to drive them into, to take them as I wanted, and Gates out of one Piece of Ground into another' (*RC*, p. 147).

When Crusoe returns to the island in the *Farther Adventures*, the ability to construct such fortifications has become a gauge of a person's suitability for life in the colony. It reflects well on the Spanish governor, when Crusoe finds that his 'old Habitation' has been so improved upon that even he cannot find his way to it:

Alas I could no more find the Place again, than if I had never been there; for they had planted so many Trees, and plac'd them in such a Posture, so thick and close to one another; and in ten Years Time they were grown so big, that *in short* the Place was inaccessible, except by such Windings and blind Ways, as they themselves only, who made them, could find. (*FA*, p. 41)

Crusoe's taste for a system of fortification intricate and opaque enough to keep its owner comfortably aloof from any stranger, has been appropriated by the island's settlers, now against the returning Crusoe's own interest. When the previously recalcitrant Englishman Will Atkins excels in constructing a wicker-work hut, incorporating a walk-way 'within the outer Wicker-wall, and without the inner, near Twenty Foot wide' (*FA*, p. 123), the reader takes it as a sign of Atkins's rehabilitation. The description of this hut is so tortuous that it

²⁰ *Letters*, p. 34.

seems designed to be as inaccessible to the reader's imagination as the actual building would be to any intruder. Consider, for example, this account of the 'outer Circle':

As soon as you were in at the Door of the outer Circle, you had a short Passage strait before you to the Door of the inner House, but on either Side was a wicker Partition, and a Door in it, by which you went, first, into a Large Room or Store-house ... and thro' that into another not quite so long; so that in the outer Circle was ten handsome Rooms, six of which, were only to be come at thro' the Apartments of the inner Tent, and serv'd as Closets or retiring Rooms to the respective Chambers of the inner Circle, and four large Warehouses or Barns ... which went in thro' one another, two on either Hand of the Passage, that led thro' the outer Door to the inner Tent. (*FA*, pp. 123-4)

Atkins presents an even more extreme case than Crusoe of someone changing suddenly from fecklessness to a neurotic concern for highly-wrought precautions against threats and misfortunes. Crusoe reflects appreciatively that 'Such a Piece of Basket-work ... was never seen in the World, nor a House or Tent, so neatly contriv'd, much less, so built' (*FA*, p. 124). Through Crusoe, Defoe offers the kind of exaggerated appreciation of the construction which he had once bestowed upon more abstract, political 'contrivances'.

All the measures which I have discussed so far are taken by Crusoe against imagined rivals. But it is only when he is forced into human contact and actually surrounded by other competing interests that his policies are tested. Laura Ann Curtis has shrewdly remarked that Crusoe's behaviour towards Friday is

the extension into the sphere of personal relationships of Crusoe's impulse to fashion potentially inimical elements in his environment into usable shapes that has dominated his whole narrative ... the same ingenuity that harnessed the tide and fashioned the pots is employed in fashioning Friday, first as a servant, then as a son and companion.²¹

The strategies which he has discovered and honed through practical achievements that are a concrete projection of these abstract tactics, must now be applied directly to unpredictable human subjects. It is in Crusoe's management of those who appear to

²¹ Curtis, *The Elusive Daniel Defoe*, p. 178.

jeopardize his supremacy on the island that the novel's debt to Defoe's quirky politics is most evident.

Crusoe's handling of the arrivals on his island is adumbrated by an episode that occurs before he is even shipwrecked: his escape from captivity with the Moor Xury. It is the first time the reader witnesses Crusoe's pleasure in hatching a 'Contrivance' (*RC*, p. 21). He seizes upon the opportunity for escape offered by his master's permission for him and the two Moors, Moely and Xury, to take out a boat for fishing. Crusoe contrives to have the boat stocked with necessary provisions without rousing the suspicions of his unwitting accomplices. He convinces Moely to bring some food and water, with the argument that they could not presume to eat their master's bread, and smuggles some of his master's wine onto the boat while Moely is on shore, so that it appears to have been there all along. He persuades Moely to bring some gunpowder, under the pretence of using it for hunting fowl: which is described by Crusoe as 'Another Trick I try'd upon him, which he innocently came into also' (*RC*, p. 22). When they have left the shore, Crusoe persuades Moely to set the sails to move further out to sea, with the apparent motive of more easily catching fish for their master. Crusoe appears to be rapidly mastering the art of making rivals complicit in his own designs.

Once Crusoe has disposed of Moely, typically implying that it is more expedient to allow him to swim gratefully ashore than to shoot at him, he can dependably exploit Xury's innocence. It is important to Crusoe that Xury swears loyalty to him at the start, proving 'that I could not mistrust him' (*RC*, p. 23). Crusoe's affection for the boy is bound up with the certainty of his unwavering service to him. When they are sailing along the shore in desperate need of water, Xury offers to go ashore for this purpose, explaining that if he is eaten by cannibals, at least Crusoe can escape. Crusoe remarks: 'The Boy answer'd with so much Affection that made me love him ever after' (*RC*, p. 25). Crusoe does not conceal Xury's usefulness to him. He admits that the Moor is 'much the better Workman' (*RC*, p.

28) in flaying a lion. But he is also a strategic asset, 'my better Councillor' (*RC*, p. 29), advising Crusoe on the right moment to approach the natives on shore.

Xury, however, has every reason not to trust Crusoe. When they are rescued by a Portuguese ship, he is sucked involuntarily into Crusoe's transactions with the captain, almost as a mere accessory to the boat. Crusoe's treatment of the boy cannot be passed over as simply the conventional behaviour of the day. It appears among a sequence of manoeuvres on Crusoe's part, resulting in a deal that is overwhelmingly advantageous to him, without exposing him (to those present, at least) as self-interested:

I told him he had been so generous to me in every thing, that I could not offer to make any Price of the Boat, but left it entirely to him, upon which he told me he would give me a Note of his Hand to pay me 80 Pieces of Eight for it at *Brasil*, and when it came there, if any one offer'd to give more he would make it up; he offer'd me also 60 Pieces of Eight more for my Boy *Xury*, which I was loath to take, not that I was not willing to let the Captain have him, but I was very loath to sell the poor Boy's Liberty, who had assisted me so faithfully in procuring my own. However when I let him know my Reason, he own'd it to be just, and offer'd me this Medium, that he would give the Boy an Obligation to set him free in ten Years, if he turn'd Christian; upon this, and *Xury* saying he was willing to go to him, I let the Captain have him. (*RC*, pp. 33-4)

Crusoe's tactical footwork here recalls the political manuals with which Defoe was well acquainted. Ian Bell has observed: 'The ease with which Crusoe turns a mercenary act of self-advancement into an act of *largesse* seems disquieting'. But, as other critics have tended to do, Bell goes on to warn the reader 'not to set it at a distance for refined moral judgement': the episode serves simply as a means of discarding Xury so that the narrative can progress.²² I would argue that, read in the light of Defoe's peculiar preoccupation with political management, the episode appears more carefully conceived. Crusoe rather than Defoe is seeking to discard Xury to his own advantage.

²² Bell, *Defoe's Fiction*, pp. 89-90. See also Kay, pp. 80-1; Richetti, *Defoe's Narratives*, pp. 31-3.

Crusoe leaves the captain to decide on the price for the boat, in the knowledge that his generosity will ensure a tidy profit for himself. Crusoe can remain the overawed, passive recipient, while he is actually engineering these events. His reluctance to sell Xury appears to stem more from a reluctance to appear ungrateful to such a loyal companion in the presence of the captain and his crew. The 'Medium' offered to Crusoe by the captain is basically a means of saving face, a loophole through which he can gain by Xury behind a facade of Christian piety. The naive Xury's consent to this design is a measure of Crusoe's manipulative virtuosity. Crusoe has received a good price for his boat, removed his obligations to Xury and made a profit from him, without apparently taking the lead in any of these affairs. Defoe intends the reader to pass moral judgement on the episode, in so far as he should recognize that Crusoe is acting solely from self-interest; but only so that the reader can then savour the aplomb with which Crusoe remorselessly pursues his interest behind a screen of religious sanctimony.

This passage foreshadows those in *Moll Flanders* where the narrator will elucidate her manoeuvres for the reader, although with more candour than Crusoe, whose deviousness is more to be inferred from the narrative. Crusoe's appearance as the inert object of the captain's largesse is belied by his bald arithmetic ('in a word, I made about 220 Pieces of Eight of all my Cargo' (RC, p.34)), betraying his active management of the whole episode. The fact that Crusoe later regrets having sold the serviceable Xury, when he is in once again in dire straits, only accentuates the self-interest which governs his relations with people. When Defoe mentions this episode in his defence of the first two parts in his Preface to *Serious Reflections*, his choice of words is revealing. Listing some of Crusoe's adventures, he reminds the reader that he has 'been in Slavery worse than *Turkish*, escaped by an exquisite Management, as that in the Story of *Xury*, and the Boat at *Sallee*' (SR, Preface, p. 5).²³ There is perhaps a suggestion in the phrase 'exquisite

²³ Birdsall has noted how Crusoe, in his treatment of the Portuguese captain, and later the captain's widow and the English captain with whom he sails from the island, 'is able to

Management', so evocative of popular Machiavellian literature, of how Defoe expected the episode to be read: as an attractive example of a perfectly executed 'masterpiece of policy', translated to a very different setting.

But this glimpse of Crusoe's manipulative expertise is premature. Defoe has Crusoe punished for his improvidence and compelled to learn opportunism as if the Xury episode had never occurred. The island initially represents a kind of tactical idyll, where he can perfect the means of securing himself against dangers, without these ever actually being tested. The appearance of the footprint and evidence of cannibalism threaten Crusoe with imminent human contact. Cannibalism had been used figuratively by Defoe in his journalism to illustrate how in the most desperate circumstances human behaviour will not respect moral bounds. In the *Review*, writing about how a decline in old-fashioned trade has drawn more and more tradesmen into unscrupulous practices, he follows the drowning metaphor with that of cannibalism:

You will not only rob your Neighbour, but if in distress, you will EAT your Neighbour, ay, and say Grace to your Meat too ____ Distress removes from the Soul, all Rlation [sic], Affection, Sense of Justice, and all the Obligagitions [sic], either Moral or Religious, that secure one Man against another.²⁴

As often in the last few years of the *Review*, Defoe's remarks about trade are equally applicable to politics, and vice versa. The cannibal is Hobbes's natural Man, reduced to the instinct for self-preservation alone. The natives in *Crusoe* are cannibals by tradition, rather than by falling on hard times, and Crusoe indulges a few pangs of cultural relativism, underpinned by self-interest, as he wonders whether he has any right or need to oppose their customs. But they present the same challenge to Crusoe's ingenuity that

have it both ways with such figures' and 'emerges in these relationships as both beneficiary and benefactor': Birdsall, pp. 28-9.

²⁴ *Review*, VIII, 302b.

confronts politicians and tradesmen: he must somehow render rivals motivated solely by self-preservation the very bedrock of his security.

Once Crusoe is aware of cannibalism on the island, the narrative's preoccupation with the gestation of political tactics comes to the fore.

It would take up a larger Volume than this whole Work is intended to be, to set down all the Contrivances I hatch'd, or rather brooded upon in my Thought, for the destroying these Creatures, or at least frightening them, so as to prevent their coming hither any more. (RC, p. 168)

He spends several years weighing his desire to make a pre-emptive strike against the risks of revealing to the natives his existence on the island. Defoe had suggested a dialectic between confrontation and detachment, force and guile, in his political writing: for example, in the *White Staff's* account of the disagreement between Oxford and the high-fliers about how to tackle the hostility of the Whigs. Crusoe's exhaustive self-debate over the most reliable means of counteracting the natives sometimes begs such a political analogy:

During all this Time, I was in the murdering Humour; and took up most of my Hours, which should have been better employ'd, in contriving how to circumvent, and fall upon them, the very next Time I should see them; especially if they should be divided, as they were the last Time, into two Parties; nor did I consider at all, that if I kill'd one Party, suppose Ten, or a Dozen, I was still the next Day, or Week, or Month, to kill another, and so another, even *ad infinitum*. (RC, p. 184)

Crusoe's dilemma is akin to that of the minister in the English party-oriented system. Since opponents can never be extirpated for good under such conditions, he must turn this endemic factiousness to his own advantage. While Crusoe is never quite able to reach a definitive policy until the cannibals actually arrive, this long period of calculation equips him for his stage-management of the final scenes on the island.

Crusoe's rescue of Friday from death by cannibalism is anything but an act of spontaneous altruism. His dream about two canoes of natives arriving on the shore, and a prisoner who escapes to his abode and responds to his mercy with loyalty, cannot simply

be seen as a prophetic vision. It actually provides Crusoe with the blueprint for action which has been so desperately wanting. But he rehearses his steps for a year and a half before there is an opportunity of realizing them. Crusoe is sometimes at pains to prove that events did not follow the course of his dream exactly, as if he wishes to soft-pedal the artificiality of his encounter with Friday. Although Friday is heading towards his 'Grove', Crusoe claims that 'I could not depend by any means upon my Dream for the rest of it, (*viz.*) that the other Savages would not pursue him thither' (*RC*, p. 202). A while later, he stresses that he did not take Friday to his main fort, but his cave on the other side of the island: 'so I did not let my Dream come to pass in that Part, *viz.* That he came into my Grove for shelter' (*RC*, p. 205). But his phrasing here only suggests that he is consciously refraining from following the dream in every detail, not that he has no control over whether events conform to his dream. This might be a case of Defoe worrying about the crudity of his plot, but it also reinforces the reader's sense of Crusoe oscillating between pride and embarrassment at the extent to which he has engineered the final developments on the island.

His method of ensuring Friday's complete subordination to him sets the precedent for his treatment of later arrivals. Because Crusoe has saved his life, Friday is obliged to him from the start, readily placing Crusoe's foot on his own head. While Friday takes the initiative in establishing power relations, to his own disadvantage, Crusoe can appear (to the reader as much as Friday) benign and disinterested, offering him food, water and a place to rest. But gratitude alone is never reliable enough. As Crusoe explains later to the Spaniard, who becomes governor of the island:

Gratitude was no inherent Virtue in the Nature of Man; nor did Men always square their Dealings by the Obligations they had receiv'd, so much as they did by the Advantages they expected. (*RC*, p. 244)

Tools must always be kept obliged through fresh contrivances.²⁵

Crusoe uses a variety of devices to bind Friday to him. He names him after the day on which he saved his life, never allowing him to forget this debt. He stages the shooting of a parrot in such a way that it leaves Friday awestruck: 'and I believe, if I would have let him, he would have worshipp'd me and my Gun' (*RC*, p. 212). Only later is Friday initiated into the 'Mystery' (*RC*, p. 222) of firearms. If Friday ever seems to regret his absolute dependence, Crusoe can exploit the force of gratitude to quite ruthless effect. When Friday expresses spontaneous delight at seeing his native land from the top of a hill, Crusoe turns 'a little more circumspect, and not so familiar and kind to him as before' (*RC*, p. 224). His insistence that his suspicions were unfounded and that he did not disclose them to Friday initially, does not detract from the impression of Crusoe teasingly manipulating Friday, rather as Defoe had imagined Oxford baiting the high-fliers of the October Club. But when Crusoe suggests to Friday that if they went on a journey to the mainland, he would be able to return home, Friday senses Crusoe's resentment and is upset. Crusoe interposes a disingenuous denial that he is angry, a tormenting reminder of Friday's earlier home-sickness, and expressions of false modesty. After Friday's grovelling, and even an offer to surrender his life immediately, Crusoe is finally satisfied. He is often at pains to stress that any wariness he showed towards Friday was unnecessary, that Friday was 'without Passions, Sullenness or Designs, perfectly oblig'd and engag'd ... that I needed to use no Precautions, as to my Safety on his Account' (*RC*, p. 209). But this state of absolute dependence is maintained by a process manipulation, from which he sometimes appears to be attempting to distract the reader.

Crusoe's policy towards Friday can be summarized as generosity at arm's length. His appearance of kindness and leniency before Friday never requires him to compromise

²⁵ For Crusoe's exploitation of gratitude, see Birdsall, pp. 29-31; and for Colonel Jack's similar handling of the slaves on the Virginia plantation, see Faller, pp. 189-95.

his absolute authority and security. There is no more graphic indication of this than Crusoe's permitting Friday to live within his outer fortifications, but still at several removes from the nerve-centre.

I began to consider where I should lodge him, and that I might do well for him, and yet be perfectly easy my self; I made a little Tent for him in the vacant Place between my two Fortifications, in the inside of the last, and in the outside of the first; and as there was a Door, or Entrance there into my Cave, I made a formal fram'd Door Case, and a Door to it of Boards, and set it up in the Passage, a little within the Entrance; and causing the Door to open on the inside, I barr'd it up in the Night, taking in my Ladders too; so that *Friday* could no way come at me in the inside of my innermost Wall, without making so much Noise in getting over, that it must needs waken me. (*RC*, p. 208)

What looks like a magnanimous offer of accomodation and friendship to Friday, is exposed for the reader as the minimum intimacy necessary to keep Friday on favourable terms.

In his management of Friday, Crusoe is not so much exercised by 'the white man's burden' as by the need to hold onto his best means of escape yet. This is made clear when the possibility of acquiring a native as servant is suggested to Crusoe by his dream. It transpires in the dream

that as soon as I had gotten this Man, I said to my self, now I may certainly venture to the main Land; for this Fellow will serve me as a Pilot, and will tell me what to do, and whether to go for Provisions; and whether not to go for fear of being devoured, what Places to venture into, and what to escape. (*RC*, p. 199)

Crusoe is seeking someone who can fill the role of counsellor, providing knowledge and skills which he lacks, while remaining entirely dependent on him: a need felt intermittently by all Defoe's protagonists. But Crusoe contrives matters so that Friday considers himself a burden upon a master who is selflessly prepared to share his knowledge and provisions with him. There is considerable irony to Friday's response to Crusoe's explanation that he must now extend his area for crops to cater for his visitor:

He appear'd very sensible of that Part, and let me know, that he thought I had much more Labour upon me on his Account, than I had for my self, and that he would work the harder for me, if I would tell him what to do. (*RC*, p. 213)

Friday says this while he is shouldering most of the burden of fencing this larger area; but Crusoe typically refrains from spelling out the irony. Crusoe has Friday in a condition of abject gratitude, when in reality Crusoe has just as many reasons to be grateful to Friday. Crusoe depends upon Friday for his escape from the island, as much as Friday is obliged to Crusoe for his life. He has produced the kind of illusion described in diplomatic manuals, in which the roles of obligee and obligor are deceptively reversed.

Friday is able to provide Crusoe with the knowledge necessary to travel to the mainland: for example, by explaining that a large boat ('*in two Canoe*') would be needed, and then finding the best wood for making such a boat ('for I found he knew much better than I what kind of Wood was fittest for it' (*RC*, p. 216)). Although Crusoe eventually equips the boat with a mast and sail, Friday's ability to steer a canoe with ease impresses Crusoe, and figuratively hints at a more general instinctive talent for survival, which is useful to Crusoe:

When she was in the Water, and tho' she was so big it amazed me to see with what Dexterity and how swift my man *Friday* would manage her, turn her, and paddle her along. (*RC*, p. 227)

The fact that Crusoe never needs to make this journey does not detract from the boost to Crusoe's hopes which Friday brings. But Friday is not only of practical benefit to Crusoe. While teaching him the fundamentals of Christianity, Crusoe also experiences an access of knowledge and power:

In laying Things open to him, I really inform'd and instructed my self in many Things, that either I did not know, or had not fully consider'd before; but which occur'd naturally to my Mind, upon my searching into them, for the Information of this poor Savage ... so that whether this poor wild Wretch was the better for me, or no, I had great Reason to be thankful that ever he came to me. (*RC*, pp. 227-8)

Friday provides the pretext not only for Crusoe to further his religious self-education, but also to become 'an Instrument under Providence' (*RC*, p. 220), as he strives to convert the native. This role marks the first stage in Crusoe's elevation into something resembling Providence itself in the final scenes on the island.

Crusoe repeats the success of his policy towards Friday, when he rescues the Spaniard and Friday's father from a similar fate. Almost as soon as Crusoe has set the Spaniard free, he 'let me know by all the Signs he could possibly make, how much he was in my Debt for his Deliverance' (*RC*, p. 235). Once this is established, Crusoe arms him so that they can deal with the remaining cannibals. A tent is made for the two new arrivals, 'in the Space without our outward Fence, and between that and the Grove of young Wood which I had planted' (*RC*, p. 241). Crusoe accounts for their position on the periphery of his fortifications, by saying that it was not possible to carry the exhausted men over his wall. But it is surely also because he intends to keep them at still one further remove from himself than Friday.

The Spaniard in fact proves to be a man after Crusoe's heart, suggesting 'with a great deal of Candor and Ingenuity' (*RC*, p. 245) how the other survivors from his ship might be bound to Crusoe, if he were to bring them from the mainland to the island. The Spaniard can contrive matters so that they will be 'directed wholly and absolutely by my Orders' (*RC*, p. 245), as Crusoe puts it. What finally convinces Crusoe that the Spaniard is a kindred spirit, is his decision to delay his journey until another harvest has produced enough corn for there to be no risk of discontent among his fellow countrymen after they have arrived. His insight into the methods of keeping dependents favourable ensures that he is Crusoe's natural successor on the island. For all the talk of signed contracts between Crusoe and the Spaniard, it is by anticipation and strategic superiority that subjects are most reliably kept obliged to their ruler.

Such means achieve their apotheosis in the closing scenes on the island. The English captain, who Crusoe rescues from mutineers when they attempt to abandon him

on the island, swears that he 'would owe his Life to me, and acknowledge it upon all Occasions as long as he liv'd' (*RC*, p. 256), in the now familiar fashion. But more oblique methods are required to manage his mutineers. While the other mutineers approach by boat, the prisoners already taken on the island are divided, to minimize the risk of them joining their comrades. A group of three are left bound in Crusoe's cave, but given provisions and a promise of liberty. The use of division to control a number of people more easily, and the apparent balance between control and concession, the latter in reality only reinforcing Crusoe's authority, both recall parallel political techniques.

The presence of three mutineers in the boat, while seven others go ashore presents a dilemma to Crusoe and the captain:

For our seizing those seven Men on Shore would be no Advantage to us, if we let the Boat escape; because they would then row away to the Ship, and then the rest of them would be sure to weigh and set Sail, and so our recovering the Ship would be lost. (*RC*, p. 263)

Crusoe recognizes that the ten mutineers on the island must be kept divided from those back on the ship. Once he has managed this smaller group, he may be able to approach the ship more confidently. It is the same problem that he faced when trying to formulate tactics for dealing with invading cannibals: how to outmanoeuvre a much larger force, which still has a stock of men to fall back on. Just as the seven men are returning to the boat, Crusoe devises 'a Stratagem to fetch them back again, and which answer'd my End to a Tittle' (*RC*, p. 264). The seven men are drawn towards the creek, so that the boat has to meet them there, and one of the three in it step upon land. Once they have divided the men in the boat, Crusoe and the captain can take them with less danger of their escape, while the other eight are pursued into the woods. When these return at night, Crusoe yet again employs dividing tactics, waiting until three of them break away and walk towards the place where Friday and the captain are waiting to ambush them. Crusoe has carefully chosen his moment for attack:

I was willing to take them at some Advantage, so to spare them, and kill as few of them as I could; and especially I was unwilling to hazard the killing any of our own Men, knowing the other were very well armed. (*RC*, p. 266)

By waiting until it is dark, his band of eight men can be passed off as a 'great Army of 50 Men' (*RC*, p. 268). Crusoe is able to accomplish a kind of 'masterpiece', outwitting a superior force with superior tactics.

His plan for taking the ship also draws upon the kind of devices which Defoe had associated with the statesman beset by jealous parties. The new prisoners are now divided, 'in Order to execute it with more Art, and secure of Success' (*RC*, p. 269). Crusoe instinctively identifies further complication with greater security. But more subtly, he makes the lives of five of these prisoners dependent on the success of five others chosen to support the captain in recovering the ship. By investing other interests in the enterprise, Crusoe can be more certain of its success: 'it was now the Business of the Prisoners, as much as of the Captain, to perswade the other five to do their Duty' (*RC*, p. 270). Crusoe is able to leave the motivation for the project to the captain and the prisoners, and remain apparently indifferent to what is actually his best opportunity for escape from the island. The whole arrangement employs the method, which had fascinated Defoe in a political context, of indiscernibly harnessing the interests of various parties to one's own prosperity.

Crusoe keeps his distance from the mutineers much more than with Friday or the Spaniard. The negotiations for surrender are conducted through one of the mutineers already taken, and then by the captain. While they yield their boat to Crusoe's men, Crusoe explains: 'I kept my self and one more out of Sight, for Reasons of State' (*RC*, p. 268). It is one of the most explicit political allusions in the text, recalling in a flash the Machiavellian literature which had proliferated around the subject. Manuel Schonhorn draws attention to the appearance of the phrase, but seems to me to draw too specific a meaning from it. He claims that 'in Defoe's time, reason of state continued to denote the extra legal power of the sovereign; it legitimated his use of the prerogative beyond statute or fundamental law when he saw a need to preserve the commonwealth'. But there is

evidence to suggest that by the early eighteenth century, it had become, for Old Whig theorists like Toland as much as for Defoe, a kind of shorthand for devious, surreptitious methods of government generally. In a later work, Defoe casually applies it to one of Satan's 'master-pieces of policy': his cunning seduction of Man into idolatry, the better to manipulate him in the future.

The same Reason of State that held for the setting up the Calves at *Bethel* and *Dan*, held good for the keeping them up, to all *Jeroboam's* Posterity.²⁶

Crusoe similarly keeps his rivals subordinate to his designs subtly and imperceptibly, exercising his authority over the prisoners only through others. The fiction of 'the Governour' is more effective in keeping them subjugated than if Crusoe were to appear in person.

So I retir'd in the Dark from them, that they might not see what Kind of a Governour they had, and call'd the Captain to me; when I call'd, as at a good Distance, one of the Men was order'd to speak again, and say to the Captain, *Captain, the Commander calls for you*; and presently the Captain reply'd, *Tell his Excellency, I am just a coming*. This more perfectly amused them; and they all believed that the Commander was just by with his fifty Men. (RC, p. 269)

Such contrivances are offered by Defoe for the reader's entertainment, just like the manoeuvres which he had described Oxford using to strengthen his ministry against a host of antagonists. A castaway desperate to get home is able to outmatch a larger number of men by staying aloof, and cultivating a reputation as a severe governor with the power to return men to England to be hanged.

When Crusoe does appear before the prisoners, it is as an instrument of the governor's, to preserve the intimidating aura that has been contrived around that post. Again, this is a means for Crusoe to avoid being identified with the authority that is responsible for their imprisonment. The inaccessible 'Governour' is always ultimately accountable for their treatment. It is only once the ship has been successfully retrieved by

²⁶ Schonhorn, p. 145; *The Political History of the Devil*, p. 185.

the captain, and Crusoe can be certain of his departure, that he can reveal himself to the most recalcitrant prisoners as governor.

The prisoners undergo a kind of show trial, as Crusoe is willing to leave them on the island, but the captain feigns disagreement, enabling Crusoe to appear especially merciful. His belief in restraining subjects through obligation rather than force remains until the end. But when this has been agreed, Crusoe feels able to 'let them into the Story of my living there, and put them into the Way of making it easy to them' (*RC*, p. 277): as if he is finally content to disclose the *arcana* of his survival on the island for their benefit, as he has done for the reader. Crusoe has progressed from serving as an agent of Providence in Friday's conversion, to apparently assuming Providence's characteristics himself. When he remarks to the mutineers 'that Providence had ensnar'd them in their own Ways, and that they were fallen into the Pit which they had digged for others' (*RC*, p. 275), he might as well be describing his own achievement. For their reversal of fortune has been masterminded by Crusoe, while he has remained as transcendent and inscrutable to his subjects as Providence is to Man.²⁷

The novel's political preoccupations are most explicit in the final third of the book, when Crusoe exercises authority over human subjects on the island, and political readings have concentrated overwhelmingly on the question of his status as a ruler during these scenes. These have tended to fall into two distinct groups. One interprets the novel as a fable for the Glorious Revolution's attempt to replace an arbitrary, hereditary monarchy with a system of government founded on property. Much is made of Crusoe's rejection of his father's authority, his appropriation of the island and insistence on a 'contract' with his subjects. The other view, expounded most recently by Manuel Schonhorn, claims that Crusoe is more inclined to see himself as an absolute monarch, jealously guarding his

²⁷ Richetti remarks on 'our sense of Crusoe's serene omnicompetence, his ability to be above circumstances while immersed in them': *Defoe's Narratives*, p. 60.

prerogative.²⁸ But to argue about whether Crusoe is a limited or an absolutist sovereign seems to me to miss the point about the nature of his authority. Defoe is in fact projecting onto Crusoe his earlier fantasy of absolute power cunningly attained with the full consent and assistance of its subjects.

Crusoe himself envisages exactly the sort of authority that he will achieve even before he has encountered Friday. This first occurs at the moment when Crusoe is most complacent about his authority on the island, just prior to the appearance of the footprint. He reflects that

There was my Majesty the Prince and Lord of the whole Island; I had the Lives of all my Subjects at my absolute Command. I could hang, draw, give Liberty, and take it away, and no Rebels among all my Subjects. (*RC*, p. 148)

There is a hint of *and yet* to the final conjunction. For what Crusoe has in mind is not just absolute power, but the knack of wielding it without alienating those who are subjected to it. Defoe accentuates the extraordinary nature of this power: he has the right to end his subjects' lives and yet any hostility towards him is almost inconceivable. This is consistently the ideal to which Crusoe aspires. But at this stage it is pure moonshine: his dependents are two cats, a dog and a parrot. Later, after Friday has appeared, but still in anticipation of further arrivals, he entertains a similar notion:

I fancied my self able to manage One, nay, Two or Three Savages, if I had them so as to make them entirely Slaves to me, to do whatever I should direct them, and to prevent their being able at any time to do me any Hurt. It was a great while, that I pleas'd my self with this Affair. (*RC*, p. 200)

Again, the vision is not just one of absolute power over his subjects, but also of absolute invulnerability to them. It is an absolutism that does not depend upon coercive measures that may stir resentment in its victims. In these two passages, Crusoe takes pleasure in

²⁸ For examples of the former, see Seidel, pp. 46-53; Richard Braverman, 'Crusoe's Legacy', *Studies in the Novel*, 18 (1986), 1-26. For the latter, see Novak, *Defoe and the Nature of Man*, pp. 50-4; Schonhorn, pp. 141-64.

simply brooding on a very specific form of power, which combines complete control with universal favour, much as Defoe does privately in his early letters to Harley.

Once the Spaniard and Friday's father have arrived, Crusoe begins to realize these fanciful schemes. He prides himself not merely on being a kind of arbitrary ruler, but on his management of his subjects:

My People were perfectly subjected: I was absolute Lord and Law-giver; they all owed their Lives to me, and were ready to lay down their Lives, *if there had been Occasion of it*, for me. It was remarkable too, we had but three Subjects, and they were of three different Religions. My Man *Friday* was a Protestant, his father was a *Pagan* and a *Cannibal*, and the *Spaniard* was a Papist: However, I allow'd Liberty of Conscience throughout my Dominions: But this is by the Way.
(*RC*, p. 241)

Crusoe exercises untrammelled power over the population and yet keeps them in a state of complete obligation rather than discontent towards him. The final remarks are far from 'by the Way': read beside Defoe's 1704 memorandum to Oxford, we can see that Crusoe is practising something far more calculating than religious tolerance. For Defoe is implying that Crusoe is in a comparable position to the minister who makes the courtship of opposing parties a means of safeguarding his position. Crusoe's appeal to three men of conflicting religions is no less than a measure of his political finesse.²⁹

But Defoe is perhaps most revealing about the appeal of Crusoe's political status in the *Farther Adventures*. When Crusoe travels through Siberia, even then the destination of enforced exiles, he meets in the capital Tobolski a former minister of the Czar. Crusoe boasts to the minister of the faultless security that he had accomplished on the island.

First, *I told him*, I had the absolute Disposal of the Lives and Fortunes of all my Subjects: That notwithstanding my absolute Power, I had not one Person disaffected to my Government, or to my Power, in all my Dominions. He shook his Head at that, and said, there indeed I out-did the Czar of *Muscovy*. *I told him*, That all the Lands in my Kingdom were my own, and all my Subjects were not

²⁹ Kay vaguely senses that the power fantasies of Defoe himself, 'an ardent entrepreneurial statesman', lie behind Crusoe's political role-play: see Kay, pp. 87-91.

only my Tenants, but Tenants at Will: That they would all fight for me to the last Drop; and that never Tyrant, *for such I acknowledg'd my self to be*, was ever so universally belov'd, and yet so horribly fear'd, by his Subjects. (*FA*, p. 351)

Crusoe's rule does not fit easily into either an absolutist or Lockean mould. He exults in having improbably attained a tyrant's absolute power even with the ready collaboration of his subjects. He has become that miraculous thing, a popular tyrant. A passage from *Mesnager* is worth considering in this context. It appears amid one of the narrator's lengthy discussions of the differences between the English and French political systems:

Upon the whole, the *English* are a Nation, who talk high of their Liberty, and of the Government being qualified to make the Monarch great and the People happy; but are in Truth as easily enslaved, and reduced to irretrievable Bondage, were they politickly managed, as any Nation in the World; and it is evident, had King *James* proceeded by due Conditions, and with moderate Management of that Power, which he had assumed ... he might in a few Years have revers'd the whole Constitution of that Country, and have made himself, even by their own Consent, as absolute a Monarch, not as the King of *France* only, but as the *Grand Seignior*, or the *Czar of Muscovy*. (*Mes*, p. 95)

Defoe imagines Crusoe demonstrating this hypothesis. Crusoe becomes as absolute a ruler as the Czar of Muscovy, as one of the Czar's former ministers confirms, through the kind of tactful manipulation which would have served James II better than his cack-handed attempts to impose Catholicism on the nation.

Elsewhere in the *Farther Adventures*, Crusoe stresses the peculiarity of his political role. He recollects having acted 'in a kind of haughty majestick Way, like an old Patriarchal Monarch' (*FA*, p. 216), but then revises this description, distinguishing between himself and any conventional ruler.

But I never so much as pretended to plant in the Name of any Government or Nation; or to acknowledge any Prince, or to call my People Subjects to any one Nation more than another; nay, I never so much as gave the Place a Name; but left it as I found it belonging to no Body; and the People under no Discipline or Government but my own; who, tho' I had Influence over them as a Father and Benefactor, had no Authority or Power, to Act or Command one Way or other, farther than voluntary Consent mov'd them to comply; yet even this, had I stay'd there, would have done well enough. (*FA*, pp. 216-17)

He is at pains to prove that his position was unauthorized and even to deny its political character. But this perhaps only reinforces the analogy with an English minister, whose fate is usually at the mercy of warring factions and who often appears bereft of any clout. Crusoe's insistence that his authority was never officially sanctioned, that it was casually and temporarily assumed by him for his own ends, in fact only makes the awe and favour in which he was held by the island's other inhabitants seem all the more remarkable.

Further evidence that Defoe is reviving the ideas that had so intrigued him in 1704 in the *Crusoe* books can be gleaned from *Serious Reflections*. Crusoe's recollection of his travels through China prompt a comparison between their absolutism and the English system. The Chinese form of government

consists in an absolute Tyranny, which, by the way, is the easiest Way of Ruling in the World, where the People are dispos'd to obey, as blindly as the *Mandarin* commands or governs imperiously; what Policy is required in governing a People, of whom 'tis said, that if you command them to hang themselves, they will only cry a little, and submit immediately? Their Maxims of Government may do well enough among themselves, but with us they would be all Confusion. (SR, p. 138)

For all his travels, Crusoe still evidently thinks of himself as a member of the English body politic. Defoe leaves it to the reader to infer that Crusoe governs the island in the image of his native country. But he does this not so much because he feels a duty to colonize foreign territory on his country's behalf, but because his circumstances on the island are so close to those of an English minister. He is surrounded by natural forces and human interests that are as unpredictable, discordant and potentially threatening as the parties and cabals that conspire against an English ministry. Alienated and alone on the island, Crusoe does not have the luxury of imposing his will upon invaders, in the confidence that they will submit: he would almost certainly become embroiled in 'Confusion'. In this passage, Crusoe speaks as much from personal experience as a patriotic faith in his own country's constitution. There is even a hint of scornful pride in his rhetorical question: through 'Policy', he has fulfilled the much greater challenge of inducing his subjects to put their

lives in his hands on their own initiative. He has contrived a political system that regulates its people as thoroughly as the French or Chinese, but which permits them the illusion of the freedom and participation offered by the English constitution.

If *Crusoe* is to be read as a political fable, it must be for Defoe's own political predilections, rather than for the more conventional philosophies usually raised in discussions of the novel's politics. The narrative arguably owes more to Defoe's observation of the turbulent politics of Queen Anne's reign, and his ultimately disappointed hopes for the minister who employed him, than to accounts of Alexander Selkirk's experiences. Where Oxford failed, permitting Defoe only sporadic celebrations of political feats in his secret histories, *Crusoe* succeeds. In a text less adulterated by fact than the *White Staff* pamphlets, *Crusoe* can be granted the time and isolation to prepare for human rivals, and then faultlessly manoeuvre them into an apparently voluntary submission. Defoe's subsequent protagonists are less privileged.

CHAPTER FIVE

Moll and Roxana: *she-politicians*.

This Knowledge I soon learnt by Experience, (*viz.*) That the State of things was altered, as to Matrimony ... that Marriages were here the Consequences of politick Schemes, for forming Interests, and carrying on Business, and that LOVE had no Share, or but very little in the Matter. (*MF*, p. 67)

The 1720s were a transitional phase for amatory fiction. The propagandistic secret histories of Manley, in which sexual intrigue served primarily to point up the deviousness and decadence of certain identifiable politicians, gave way to out-and-out fiction concerned with sexual desire in its own right.¹ The trend is to some extent reflected in Defoe's evolution from a writer of embellished accounts of recent politics into the author of *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, two novels with female protagonists which appear to be far removed from the cabals of Anne's reign. But they do not sit comfortably with other popular fiction of the 1720s. *Moll Flanders* refuses to conform to the narrative dictates of either the criminal life or the picaresque tale; while *Roxana* has little recourse to the titillating accounts of love-making or cloying evocations of luxurious settings which characterize Eliza Haywood's scandal fiction.²

Their idiosyncrasy is partly due to Defoe's calculating exploitation of a diversity of popular literary genres, never allowing one genre to become predominant, in the hope of appealing to as wide a constituency of readers as possible. But I would argue that Defoe's first-hand experience of party politics, which sets him apart from a political innocent like Haywood, and the private preoccupations which it nourished, are also significant factors.

¹ See Ros Ballaster, *Seductive Forms* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 153-8.

² For contrasting views on *Roxana's* debt to the secret history, see Faller, pp. 49-55; Richetti, *Situations and Structures*, pp. 192-7.

These two novels are as much indebted to a prevailing female caricature, into which Defoe is able to channel his taste for Machiavellism, as they are to contemporary developments in amatory fiction.

During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the aspiring female politician became a familiar cliché in literature, concealing a genuine male anxiety about the rise of the well-informed, independent-minded middle-class woman. In the 1680s, the author Elinor James was scornfully referred to as 'that She-State-Politician' for her writing in support of James II.³ A wide range of writing exploited the motif, often insinuating that women were beginning to exert their political acumen in the home. In the *Tatler* and *Spectator*, and more subtly in Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*, weighty public affairs are jumbled with high society gossip, tea-drinking, billet-doux and ombre to satirical effect.⁴ Ambrose Philips's verse Epilogue to Susanna Centlivre's play *The Wonder: A Woman Keeps a Secret* playfully entertains the notion of women liberating themselves through their excellence in established political practices:

*But were the Women all of my Opinion,
We'd soon shake off this false usurp'd Dominion;
We'd make the tyrants own, that we cou'd prove,
As fit for other Business as for Love.
Lord! What Prerogative might we obtain,
Could we from Yielding, a few Months refrain!
How fondly wou'd our starving Lovers doat!
What Homage wou'd be paid to Petticoat!
'Twould be a Jest to see the change of Fate,
How we might all of Politicks Debate;
Promise, and Swear, what we ne'er meant to do,
And what's still harder, keep your Secret too.*

³ See Janet Todd, *The Sign of Angellica* (London: Virago, 1989), p. 18. On the female types circulated by male authors generally, see pp. 33-5.

⁴ See Maynard Mack, *Alexander Pope* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 255-7.

It implies that in the course of the play, women will prove their aptitude for practical politics in a less public context. Edward Ward's popular *Female Policy Detected* borrows the format of the political manual to alert men to the devices which women employ to manage them to their own advantage. Women are explicitly associated with Machiavellian politics in a number of its counsels:

Raise not an Opinion of your Self upon the Flatteries of a Woman, nor think her Praises any sign of Love, but of her Cunning; for designing Women like great Politicians, flatter them most they design to Ruin.

Expect no good Quality in a Woman more than what she shows; for it is a Maxim in their Politicks, to put the best Side outwards.

Here, it is almost assumed that women are born politicians. Mrs. Western in Fielding's *Tom Jones* is a later manifestation of the cliché: she has read 'most of the political pamphlets and journals, published within the last twenty years. From which she had attained a very competent skill in politics'. Consequently, she is more *au fait* with political jargon and gossip than her brother, Squire Western, who has stood twice as a candidate in elections, but whose political knowledge is confined to the prejudices of a Jacobite backwoodsman. Moreover, she readily couches in political terms her designs to have her niece Sophia suitably married. Squire Western serves as a comic mouthpiece for the male disquiet which lurks beneath these satires, encouraging his sister to talk more of 'women's matters': 'You know I don't love to hear you talk about politics, they belong to us, and petticoats should not meddle'.⁵

Defoe too contributes to this running conceit. In the *Review* in May 1710, he imagines 'a Transmutation of Customs' in the political life of London:

⁵ Susanna Centlivre, *The Wonder: A Woman Keeps a Secret* (London: E. Curll, 1714), p. 80; Edward Ward, *Female Policy Detected* (London: B. Harris, 1716), pp. 4, 5-6; Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, edited by R.P.C. Mutter (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1988), pp. 254, 256.

The Women lay aside their Tea and Chocolate, leave off Visiting after Dinner, and forming themselves into Caballs, turn Privy-Counsellors, and settle the State ... My Lady L_____ has her Offices of several kinds for Intelligence, and Correspondence ____ And every Lady of Quality, has her Head more particularly full of Business than usual; nay, some of the Ladies talk of keeping Female Secretaries.

The account continues in similar vein:

All the thing call'd Gallantry, and Gayety, is laid aside; no Body Dresses, no Body drinks Chocolate ____ *Business*, the Weighty thing call'd *Business* Engrosses the Sex; Matters of Government and Affairs of State, are become the Province of the Ladies, and no Wonder if they are too much Engag'd, to concern themselves about the common impertinences of Life.

The main targets of this fantasy are the male politicians (Defoe particularly has in mind Tory high-fliers) who have abdicated their responsibilities to such an extent that their function has now been usurped by women, while they are reduced to the social trivia conventionally associated with the female sex. In the course of this specific attack, Defoe clearly invokes the cliché of the woman versed in politics and exploits 'this new Invasion of the Politicians [sic] Province' as a male bugbear.⁶

One of the main targets for ridicule in both the *White Staff* and *Mesnager* is Abigail Masham, the increasingly influential bedchamber woman to the Queen, who would soon have responsibility for the Privy Purse. In the former, Defoe offers a hostile portrayal of Masham, but one that is not without a sneaking regard for her proficiency in the Machiavellian technique of supplanting those who were originally the source of one's promotion. She steadily replaced the Duchess of Marlborough as the Queen's favourite, as she

daily detected the Wickedness of those who long before had abus'd the Goodness of their Benefactor, every Insolence which a proud Woman or two had push'd them upon, and every Act of Ingratitude, which appear'd in their Conduct, as it

⁶ *Review*, VII, 69a, 69a-b, 70a, 71a. These passages are discussed in Shirlene Mason, *Daniel Defoe and the Status of Women* (St. Albans, Ver. and Montreal: Eden Press Women's Publications, 1978), pp. 16-17.

came to the Ears of the Person against whom it was committed, fail'd not to gain to this She-Artist the same Ground in the Persons Favour which the other had lost. (*WS*, II, 38-9)

Masham is made to seem rather petty and scheming, but she is essentially carrying off the same manoeuvre through which Oxford toppled his one-time ally Godolphin to his own advantage. In *Mesnager*, she appears as the 'Lady ----' at court, 'my Female Minister of State' (*Mes*, p. 293), whom the French agent meets and later corresponds with, and who for a while seems to Mesnager to be a more helpful contact than Oxford or his ministers. She herself contrasts her efficiency and reliability with the evasions of '*these Politick People*' (*Mes*, p. 270). But these virtues are not enough to counteract Oxford's inscrutable manoeuvres and her attempts to facilitate a Jacobite revolution fail. In both these instances, Defoe seizes upon Masham as living testimony to the accuracy of the stereotype of the female politician.

Later, in *The Political History of the Devil*, Defoe invokes the myth when he discusses Satan's seduction of Eve. He claims that at this moment Satan instilled in Eve the conviction that has afflicted so many of her descendants:

that she should be wiser than *Adam*, and should by the superiority of her understanding, necessarily have the government over him; which, at present, she was sensible she did not, he being master of a particular air of gravity and majesty, as well as of strength, infinitely superior to her. This is an ill-natur'd suggestion; but it must be confess'd the impatient desire of government, which (since that) appears in the general behaviour of the sex, and particularly of governing husbands, leaves too much room to legitimate the supposition.⁷

His use of the word 'government' invites us to make a political inference. The notion of the woman absurdly attempting to fulfil her political aspirations in the domicile comes hazily into view. Defoe's mockery here is worth bearing in mind when we are tempted to take the proto-feminist demands of Moll and Roxana at face value.

⁷ *The Political History of the Devil*, pp. 160-1.

In *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, Defoe seems to me to be utilizing this convention of male amusement at the acquisition of political characteristics by women, as a means of sublimating his fascination with political management in amatory fiction. Lincoln Faller has noted that while the overwhelming majority of criminal lives focused on male criminals, two of the four criminal novels produced by Defoe have female protagonists and contain several other significant female characters.⁸ I would argue that invented female characters appealed to Defoe as potential proxies for the Machiavellian fantasies which he had originally bestowed upon an actual male politician, to considerable controversy in the case of the *White Staff* pamphlets. Defoe's curiosity about the 'masterpiece of policy', related and analysed with relish, could be safely secreted within an established female stereotype, while the popular appeal of both could be exploited outside the party political fray, where Defoe had no shortage of enemies ready to capitalize upon his indiscretions.

Moll is taught the importance of a politician's tactical calculation by her early experience as a servant to a family in Colchester, much as shipwreck miraculously awakens Crusoe's capacity for opportunism and ingenuity. But Defoe does not allow the narrative simply to trace Moll's gradual evolution into a sublime manipulator: the theme of political management is more diffuse, as if Defoe partly wishes to divert the reader's attention from its presence in the novel. Thus, Moll displays some cunning even before she has arrived in Colchester (just as Crusoe's subtle use of Xury precedes his revelatory shipwreck), while the Machiavellian role is sometimes assumed by other characters, such as the elder brother at Colchester and Moll's 'governess', allowing Moll herself briefly to appear in a more innocent light.

Moll's skill at eluding the constraints of the law is already discernible in her account of her childhood. Even while she insists that her refusal to leave her nurse and 'go

⁸ Faller, p. 48.

to Service' was quite spontaneous and innocent, she suggests that a fortuitous manipulation produces the desired effect on the nurse:

I had no Policy in all this, you may easily see it was all Nature, but it was joyn'd with so much Innocence, and so much Passion, That in short, it set the good Motherly Creature a weeping too, and she cry'd at last as fast as I did. (*MF*, p. 12)

This impression of unconscious artifice beneath apparent innocence pervades these early scenes. Moll's misunderstanding of the word 'Gentlewoman' is comically naive, but as she defines it, it is at least an attainable goal: 'to be able to Work for myself, and get enough to keep me without that terrible Bug-bear *going to Service*' (*MF*, p. 13). As visitors pay the nurse for the amusement which Moll provides, the nurse buys pretty clothes for Moll, which in turn bring more visits and donations, and even offers of work. She eventually becomes 'a Gentlewoman indeed, as I understood that Word, and as I desir'd to be' (*MF*, p. 15), frustrating the impending demands of the magistrate. However, her nurse's death and the difficulty of reclaiming her money from the nurse's sister suddenly reverse her progress.

Once Moll is forced into 'Service' for a family in Colchester, her early, involuntary astuteness is quickly forgotten. Now, for the most part, she plays the easy dupe to the sly elder brother of the family. He provides the first instance in the novel of a character appropriating distinctly Machiavellian techniques to private ends. Moll describes him as one who 'tho' he had Levity enough to do an ill natur'd thing, yet had too much Judgement of things to pay too dear for his Pleasures' (*MF*, p. 19). He has the refined politician's knack of enjoying the fulfilment of his designs without being held accountable for them. He is able to indulge in an intentionally brief affair with Moll, while retaining an inviolable reputation for integrity within his family, and initially even with Moll herself. Defoe's use of the same hunting and gambling imagery which he had applied to Oxford's haughty exploitation of Tory high-fliers, especially in part I of *The Secret History of the October Club*, identifies the elder brother with political practices. His skill at giving flattering

descriptions of Moll to his sisters when she is within earshot is introduced in the following terms:

This he contriv'd so subtilly, as if he had known as well, how to catch a Woman in his Net, as a Partridge when he went a Setting; for he would contrive to be talking this to his Sisters when tho' I was not by, yet when he knew I was not so far off, but that I should be sure to hear him ...

AFTER he had thus baited his Hook, and found easily enough the Method how to lay it in my Way, he play'd an opener Game. (*MF*, pp. 19-20)

He manipulates the vain, impressionable Moll's heartstrings with the same impudent finesse with which Defoe had imagined Oxford keeping the Tories dependent upon his ministry.⁹

The elder brother starts by flirting with Moll, deliberately stopping short of 'the last Favour': this good impression stands him in good stead for more daring approaches later. As Moll now perceives, 'he made that self denial of his a Plea for all his Freedoms with me upon other Occasions after this' (*MF*, p. 25). Later, he seizes upon his younger brother Robin's tactless proposals to Moll, which endanger her position in the household, as a means of extricating himself from the affair without needing to reveal himself in an uncompromising light. While Moll is dependent upon his advice and influence, he knows that he can manoeuvre her into marriage to Robin without fear of reproach, as he has always hedged his own promises to her, never seriously placing himself under any obligation. As he explains to Moll with specious affection:

My Dear, I have not broken one Promise with you yet; I did tell you I would Marry you when I was come to my Estate; but you see my Father is a hail healthy Man, and may live these thirty Years still, and not be Older than several are

⁹ The use of such imagery in the novel has been widely noted, although not its political connotations for Defoe: see Blewett, pp. 114-5; E. Anthony James, *Daniel Defoe's Many Voices* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1972), pp. 214-8; Arthur Sherbo, 'Moll Flanders: Defoe as Transvestite?', in *Studies in the Eighteenth Century English Novel* (East Lansing, Mich.: Michigan State University Press, 1979), pp. 136-67.

round us in the Town; and you never propos'd my Marrying you sooner, because you know it might be my Ruin; and as to all the rest, I have not fail'd you in any thing, you have wanted for nothing. (*MF*, p. 38)

He reminds Moll of her own tacit complicity in his designs. Her attempts to remove 'all Possibility of quitting me but by a down right breach of Honour, and giving up all the Faith of a Gentleman' (*MF*, p. 50) are ineffectual against one so adept at avoiding obligations to others. By the end of the episode, while Robin's attraction to Moll is widely known among the family, the elder brother appears as a level-headed counsellor with no vested interest in her marriage to Robin. His mother even innocently arranges a meeting between him and Moll, in the hope that he will be a good influence on her. In fact, he only offers her the stark alternatives of banishment from the family in disgrace or a prosperous marriage to his brother, leaving her almost no freedom for manoeuvre: 'Thus in a Word, I may say, he Reason'd me out of my Reason; he conquer'd all my Arguments' (*MF*, p. 57).

In her capacity as narrator, Moll analyses the elder brother's contrivances in a manner that recalls popular Machiavellian literature. Defoe's own interests are clearly at work here; but such reflections also suit Moll's character. Although the elder brother first opens her eyes to methods of manipulating others at no cost to oneself, she later surpasses his ingenuity. Retrospectively, she can offer an authoritative commentary on her own gullibility and even his tactical shortcomings:

In short, if he had known me, and how easy the Trifle he aim'd at, was to be had, he would have troubled his Head no farther, but have given me four or five Guineas, and have lain with me the next time he had come at me; and if I had known his Thoughts, and how hard he thought I would be to be gain'd, I might have made my own Terms with him; and if I had not Capitulated for an immediate Marriage, I might for a Maintenance till Marriage, and might have had what I would. (*MF*, pp. 25-6)

She makes an ethical objection to her behaviour, but the brunt of the criticism is aimed at the ineptitude of both partners in pursuing their respective interests. The most prudent course that was available to each party is elucidated almost impartially. With similar

critical detachment, Moll comprehends the elder brother's final feat of passing off his self-interested exploitation of his brother's love for her as fraternal charity.

He Cajol'd with his Brother, and perswaded him what Service he had done him, and how he had brought his Mother to Consent, which *tho' True*, was not indeed done to serve him, but to serve himself; but thus diligently did he cheat him, and had the Thanks of a faithful Friend for shifting off his Whore into his Brothers Arms for a Wife. (*MF*, pp. 57-8)

Moll applies the appreciative adverb 'diligently' to his execution of the manoeuvre, just as Defoe had evaluated Oxford's artifices.¹⁰

Moll's treatment at the hands of a male philanderer provides the occasion for Defoe's variation on the theme of the female politician.¹¹ Her final comment on the elder brother is both a resentful personal judgement and an indication of what she has learnt from him:

So certainly does Interest banish all manner of Affection, and so naturally do Men give up Honour and Justice, Humanity, and even Christianity, to secure themselves. (*MF*, p. 58)

¹⁰ Robert Donovan momentarily comes closer than any other commentator to my view that *Moll Flanders* stealthily explores a Machiavellian notion of politics: he sees Moll achieving a 'master stroke of policy' at Colchester by eliciting the goodwill of the family for initially renouncing Robin, and yet still having her way and marrying him. But Donovan seems to me to misunderstand this episode. Retrospectively, Moll is evidently embarrassed by her inability to secure the elder brother as her husband and the ease with which she is fobbed off with the obtuse younger brother. It is her experience as the object of the elder brother's 'master strokes' that motivates her to outdo him in such tactics during the rest of the novel. After Colchester, there are better examples of Moll savouring 'the special piquancy' of her manoeuvres. See Donovan, *The Shaping Vision* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1966), pp. 39-41; for a rejection of his reading of this episode, see Marie-Paule Laden, *Self-Imitation in the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 60.

¹¹ The significance of the Colchester episode as a turning-point for Moll has been widely noted: see Birdsall, pp. 74-6; Richard Bjornson, *The Picaresque Hero in European Fiction* (Wisconsin and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977), pp. 195-9; Richetti, *Defoe's Narratives*, pp. 101-8.

Moll's vengeance involves embracing the pre-eminence of 'Interest' in all human affairs and turning the kind of management in which the elder brother was skilled against the male sex. At present such conduct is an exclusive male preserve, ensuring that women are always at a strategic disadvantage during courtship. As Moll concludes shortly after the demise of her second, unsuccessful marriage to an improvident tradesman:

As the Market run very Unhappily on the Mens side, I found the Women had lost the Privilege of saying No, that it was a Favour now for a Woman to have THE QUESTION ask'd, and if any young Lady had so much Arrogance as to Counterfeit a Negative, she never had the Opportunity given her of denying twice; much less of Recovering that false Step, and accepting what she had but seem'd to decline: The Men had such Choice every where, that the Case of the Women was very unhappy ... (MF, pp. 67-8)

Moll's complaint is basically that women do not have the opportunity to intrigue on equal terms with men, and are expected to be under a permanent obligation to them. There is no possibility of keeping a lover on tenterhooks and manoeuvring him into a position of dependence. A while later, Moll concludes 'that Women ought to be the more Nice' (MF, p. 74): by which she means primarily that women should be more cautious and selective in their choice of husbands, because there are more profligate men than women at large. But the phrase also suggests a more general plea for greater subtlety and guile from women in their pursuit of a lucrative marriage. Moll argues that

the Women have ten Thousand times the more Reason to be wary and backward, by how much the hazard of being betray'd is the greater; and would the Ladies consider this, and act the wary Part, they would discover every Cheat that offer'd; for, *in short*, the Lives of very few Men now a-Days will bear a Character; and if the Ladies do but make a little Enquiry, they will soon be able to distinguish the Men and deliver themselves. (MF, p. 75)

Beneath all Moll's reasoning lies the desire for women to outsmart men and consequently emerge from amatory encounters as the more secure party. She has basically reached the same conviction that Defoe expresses in his memorandum to Harley of 1704: that given the Hobbesian character of modern society, an interest is most reliably advanced and protected through oblique steps rather than crude, impetuous measures. Moll values those

women who approach potential husbands with circumspection above those 'that run into Matrimony, as a Horse rushes into the Battle' (*MF*, p. 75). She claims that

there is no Woman ... but if she manages well, may be Marry'd safely one time or other; but if she precipitates herself, it is ten Thousand to one but she is undone. (*MF*, p. 76)

While such passages may express proto-feminist sentiments, it should be understood that Defoe is not so much venting his own views on marriage, which were relatively conservative, as displacing pet strategies, born of a male-dominated political world, onto a popular female stereotype.¹² Henceforth, much of the novel offers the entertaining spectacle, as Defoe would have seen it, of a woman adopting the underhand contrivances of Machiavellian politics.

The passages from which I have been quoting are interpolated between two perfect illustrations of the kind of tactics to which Moll is now committed. In London she befriends a widow who is also searching for a prosperous alliance. The widow has been spurned by a captain who resents her attempts to enquire into his circumstances. Moll sets about teaching her friend how she might have the satisfaction of transforming such an arrogant man into one who will abjectly plead with her to take him as her husband. The captain's reputation is smeared through carefully circulated gossip, until all the respectable women in the neighbourhood cold-shoulder him. This drives the captain back to the widow whom he had treated so peremptorily. The widow renders him even more desperate to marry her by arranging for a relation to visit her regularly, so that she appears

¹² The most convincing feminist readings of *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* recognize the limitations of the feminist arguments expressed in these novels: see Laura Brown, 'Amazons and Africans: Daniel Defoe', in *Ends of Empire* (Ithaca, N.Y. and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 135-69; Lois Chaber, 'Matriarchal Mirror: Women and Capital in *Moll Flanders*', *PMLA*, 97 (1982), pp. 212-26. For the general conservatism of Defoe's views on women and marriage, see Blewett, pp. 66-8; Mason, pp. 18-22, 48-9; Robert Merrett, 'The Traditional and Progressive Aspects of Daniel Defoe's Ideas about Sex, Family and Marriage', *English Studies in Canada*, 12 (1986), 1-22.

to be courted by a wealthy gentleman. As often in the novel, it is Moll's subsequent reflections on the manoeuvre that merit the closest attention:

After these things, this young Lady played her part so well, that tho' she resolved to have him, and that indeed having him was the main bent of her design, yet she made his obtaining her be TO HIM the most difficult thing in the World; and this she did, not by a haughty Reserv'd Carriage, but by a just Policy, turning the Tables upon him, and playing back upon him his own Game; for as he pretended by a kind of lofty Carriage, to place himself above the Occasion of a Character, and to make enquiring into his Character a kind of an affront to him, she broke with him upon that Subject; and at the same time that she made him submit to all possible enquiry after his Affairs, she apparently shut the Door against his looking into her own. (*MF*, p. 73)

The widow conceals her determined pursuit of the captain by placing him under an illusory obligation to her. There is an almost sadistic pleasure to be had in forcing the captain to undergo the enquiries into his character which he had earlier resented; while the captain's delusion that this is his last possible chance of marriage, which has been induced through the widow's management, guarantees that he will not dare to question her character. All these ironies are savoured by Moll in her role as commentator.

This project has been devised by Moll for the widow's benefit, but curiously Defoe now has the widow recommend a comparable scheme to Moll, as if she is incapable of handling her own affairs. It is the first of several examples of Defoe dispersing the Machiavellian theme among other characters, as if reluctant to identify it too conspicuously with his protagonist. But once she begins to relate the scheme, it is as if it is entirely her own work. She conscientiously selects a man who is certain to accept the rumour that she is wealthy without seeking corroboration. During their courtship, Moll daringly claims again and again that he is only wooing her because she is rumoured to possess a fortune. He cannot admit this to be the case without losing any chance of marriage to Moll, while she cannot be held to account for what is only hearsay. Moll revels in the brinkmanship upon which the scheme depends:

This was my Man, but I was to try him to the bottom, and indeed in that consisted my Safety; for if he baulk'd, I knew I was undone, as surely as he was undone if he took me. (*MF*, p. 78)

The more she doubts his love, and insists that she is really poor, risking his continued interest in her, the more she is securing herself against future accusations of duplicity. As they exchange statements inscribed on a window with a diamond ring, Moll drives the man into ever more extravagant pledges of his disinterested love for her; while she dismisses these with casual remarks proclaiming that self-interest governs all human affairs, such as '*But Money's Virtue; Gold is Fate*' (*MF*, p. 79).

Once again, Defoe's debt to popular Machiavellian literature can be glimpsed in Moll's analysis of the stratagem:

Tho' I had jested with him, as he suppos'd it, so often about my Poverty, yet, when he found it to be true, he had foreclosed all manner of objection, seeing whether he was in jest or in earnest, he had declar'd he took me without any regard to my Portion, and whether I was in jest or in earnest, I had declar'd my self to be very Poor, so that *in a word*, I had him fast both ways; and tho' he might say afterwards he was cheated, yet he could never say that I had cheated him ...

HE persued me close after this, and as I saw there was no need to fear losing him, I play'd the indifferent part with him longer than Prudence might otherwise have dictated to me: But I considered how much this caution and indifference would give me the advantage over him, when I should come to be under the Necessity of owning my own Circumstances to him; and I manag'd it the more warily, because I found he inferr'd from thence, as indeed he ought to do, that I either had the more Money, or the more Judgement, and would not venture at all. (*MF*, p. 80)

Moll fastidiously deconstructs her manoeuvre for the reader's benefit, disclosing how her apparently playful admission of poverty effectively disarmed her partner. She relishes the fact that she both manipulated him and precluded any such accusation. She comes close to admitting that her teasing was supererogatory, before presenting it as a perfectionist's thoroughness. Defoe's private obsessions surface as Moll's jubilant pride in her tactical triumphs over the male sex.¹³

¹³ Starr focuses on this episode, seeing it as tackling familiar casuistical questions about the definition of a lie: *Defoe and Casuistry*, pp. 130-3. While I would agree that Defoe is acquainted with popular writing dealing with casuistry, I think Starr misses the

Moll's apparently flawless contrivances, while brilliantly serving their immediate end, are, like Oxford's scintillating political stunts in the *White Staff* pamphlets, ultimately unsuccessful. When she travels with her new husband to his estate in Virginia, it transpires that he is her brother. But she continues to practise the same techniques in her quest for a wealthy husband.

Her protracted relationship with the bank clerk is another example. She initially approaches him about a means of securing what money she has, before travelling north in search of a new husband. But it becomes clear that the clerk is attracted to Moll as a potential means of escape from his present loveless marriage. Moll discreetly encourages his hopes, recognizing that he would be a prime catch, but refuses to commit herself to him until he has obtained a divorce.¹⁴ Typically, she enjoys this opportunity to keep him in suspense. For example, conducting the reader through their second meeting, she explains how she was prepared to leave at one point: 'and accordingly began to put on my Gloves and prepare to be gone, tho' at the same time I no more intended it than he intended to let me' (*MF*, p. 139). When the clerk offers an immediate marriage, with the condition that they will not sleep together until the divorce has been obtained, Moll reveals:

My Heart said yes to this offer at first Word, but it was necessary to Play the Hypocrite a little more with him; so I seemed to decline the Motion with some warmth ... I PLAYED with this Lover, as an Angler does with a Trout: I found I had him fast on the Hook, so I jested with his new Proposal; and put him off; I told him he knew little of me, and had him enquire about me; I let him also go Home with me to my Lodging, tho' I would not ask him to go in, for I told him it was not Decent. (*MF*, p. 140)

impudence with which Defoe's characters exploit these discrepancies between appearance and reality, and lovingly analyse their feats: traits which derive more from political literature. Moll's 'self-glorifying' tone and condescension towards those she manipulates are discussed by Birdsall, pp. 75-7.

¹⁴ Starr notes how Moll uses legitimate scruples 'quite unscrupulously' during her relationship with the clerk, concealing her continual calculation: *Defoe and Casuistry*, p. 140.

Although Moll's desire to wait until the clerk produces evidence of a divorce is understandable, at times she depicts her manipulation of him as almost gratuitous. The imagery reveals that Defoe has in mind the same technique of detached exploitation which he had ascribed to Oxford in the first part of *The Secret History of the October Club*. Throughout her marriage to her Irish-Lancastrian husband Jemmy, and during her subsequent return to London, Moll continues to use the clerk as a means of securing her money, as well as a possible future husband. Eventually, after her separation from Jemmy, she does marry him; but all her manoeuvring has only led to another profitless marriage.

Jemmy perhaps comes closest of all Moll's husbands to rivalling her ingenuity, although he also shows signs of fecklessness, particularly after their final reacquaintance and transportation to Virginia. Their courtship is one of mutual artfulness, each misleading the other about their estates, producing a marriage 'upon the foot of a double Fraud' (*MF*, p. 148). While Moll appears to feel a greater affinity with Jemmy than with any of her other husbands, her conduct towards him is as guarded as ever. While she presents herself as a plain-dealer in Jemmy's eyes, she drops a number of indiscretions about her discreet evasions for the reader's amusement:

It was my happiness hitherto that I had not discovered myself or my Circumstances at all; no not so much as my Name; and seeing there was nothing to be expected from him ... but to live on what I knew would soon be wasted, I resolv'd to conceal everything but the *Bank Bill*, and the Eleven Guineas which I had own'd. (*MF*, p. 149)

When they agree with apparent regret to separate, as Jemmy wishes to seek his fortune in Ireland, Moll still keeps up a smoke-screen between them:

I gave him a Direction how to write to me, tho' still I reserv'd the grand Secret, and never broke my Resolution, which was not to let him ever know my true Name, who I was, or where to be found. (*MF*, p. 159)

She adopts the same strategy of mystification that Defoe favoured in government, maintaining an impression of intimacy and generosity towards Jemmy, but still contriving to remain at several removes from him.

In *Roxana*, Defoe seems at greater pains to conceal and offset the Machiavellian influence in the novel. It is even less the case here than in *Moll Flanders* that the protagonist steadily develops into an assured political manager. Roxana's attachment to such tactics seems far from constant, largely because Defoe has her express moral compunction over her past much more laboriously and convincingly than Moll.

However, Defoe still uses the cliché of the female politician as a decoy for his own political leanings. Roxana is initially shown the depths of ineptitude which men can plumb by her marriage to an incompetent brewer. A contrast is established between Roxana, 'sharp as a Hawk in Matters of common knowledge; quick and smart in Discourse' (*Rox*, p. 6), and the husband who is 'positive and obstinate, and the most positive in the most simple and inconsistent Things' (*Rox*, p. 9). They illustrate the polarity between subtlety and conspicuous force that is a recurrent theme in Defoe's work. Albeit intermittently, she prides herself on her superiority to a man like the brewer in a field that is usually associated with the male sex: the calculation and execution of political tactics. By the time she is defending her right to remain a mistress to her Dutch merchant, instead of becoming his wife, she seems to have arrived at similar conclusions to those which Moll reaches after her experience at Colchester:

I return'd, that while a Woman was single, she was a Masculine in her politick Capacity; that she had then the full Command of what she had, and the full Direction of what she did; that she was a Man in her separated Capacity, to all Intents and Purposes that a Man cou'd be so to himself; that she was controul'd by none, because unaccountable to none, and was in Subjection to none. (*Rox*, pp. 148-9)

Roxana's proto-feminism amounts to a desire for complete freedom for strategic manoeuvre. She demands the right to pursue her own interest through the techniques of worsting rivals without risking responsibility for one's exploits, that Defoe had originally recommended to a male politician. Marriage means that 'she is to have no Interest; no Aim; no View; but all is the Interest, Aim, and View, of the Husband' (*Rox*, p. 149). The

husband would continually be the moving force behind the relationship, however balanced it might appear:

Ay, *says I*, you'll allow me to steer, *that is*, hold the Helm, but you'll conn the Ship, *as they call it*; that is, as at Sea, a Boy serves to stand at the Helm, but he that gives him the Orders, is Pilot. (*Rox*, pp. 150-1)

The imagery recalls that of the pilot steering the ship of state, which Defoe had invoked so often in the *Review*, as well as, more faintly, his favourite wheels-within-wheels metaphor. In marriage, the merchant would always be the one imperceptibly orchestrating the relationship according to his interest, never Roxana.

Defoe's political inclinations are perhaps most discernible in Roxana's management of the French prince and the Dutch merchant. Once her affair with the prince is under way, he shows himself to be willing to give her almost anything she wants. Her response is typically adroit:

and yet I did not ask of him with an Air of Avarice, as if I was greedily making a Penny of him, but I manag'd him with such Art, that he generally anticipated my Demands. (*Rox*, p. 66)

Roxana fleetingly unfolds her manoeuvre, drawing attention to the way she got what she wanted from the prince, while still appearing as the passive recipient. The prince alone seems to be taking the initiative. She does not deny that she was 'making a Penny' from him, only that she avoided appearing acquisitive. Similarly, when the prince suggests that a particular old woman (who 'look'd so like a Spy upon me' (*Rox*, p. 77)) should serve Roxana in the country retreat where she is to have her child, she dissuades him obliquely and is allowed to take her own servant Amy instead:

By the Management of my Tongue, as well as by the Strength of reasoning, I convinc'd him, that it would not be at all convenient; that it would be the greater Risque on his Side; and that first, or last, it would certainly expose him, and me also. (*Rox*, p. 77)

She achieves the end that she desires, while appearing to argue on behalf of his interests. Her sinister rival is presented as more of a threat to the prince than to herself.

A fuller example of how Roxana shrewdly ensures the prince's continued generosity towards her occurs when he suddenly sets down a purse of 300 pistoles at her toilet. She exposes her studied reaction for the reader:

I saw him lay it down, and understood what he meant, but I took no Notice of it, till I came to it (as it were) casually; then I gave a great Cry-out, and fell a-scolding in my Way. (*Rox*, pp. 96-7)

Roxana clearly wants the money from the start, but her response is calculated to give an impression of wounded pride and a complete absence of self-interest. She goes on to express a kind of exasperated gratitude:

I told him, he was unkind; that he would never give me an Opportunity to ask him for any thing; and that he forc'd me to Blush, by being too much oblig'd, *and the like*; all which I knew was very agreeable to him; for as he was Bountiful, beyond Measure, so he was infinitely oblig'd by my being so backward to ask any Favours; and I was even with him, for I never ask'd him for a Farthing in my Life. (*Rox*, p. 97)

Roxana draws attention to how her complaints against his excessive generosity in fact work to preserve that generosity more effectively than if she had been more forward in taking advantage of it. There is a playfulness to her last claim: although she has never requested anything openly, she has extorted a small fortune from him by more indirect means. Exploiting his sense of 'Honour', Roxana manoeuvres the prince into a state of near-guilt at his own largesse, as she remarks 'that I hop'd he did not give, meerly to avoid the Trouble of being importun'd' (*Rox*, p. 97). Thus, the prince is obliged to expect and even plead with Roxana to ask for gifts:

He said, a Man of Honour ought always to know what he ought to do; and as he did nothing but what he knew was reasonable, he gave me Leave to be free with him, if I wanted any thing; that he had too much Value for me, to deny me any thing, if I ask'd. (*Rox*, p. 97)

By the end of the episode, Roxana is in a position where she cannot apparently lose: she knows that the prince enjoys giving presents to her, even if she has secretly determined his actions, and if she does need to request anything, the prince has forfeited any right to

suspect her of greed. It is a kind of tactical 'masterpiece', explained by Roxana herself, and appropriately executed in France, where 'there are no greater Intriguers in the Universe than themselves' (*Rox*, p. 67). Such methods enable her to have the prince '*all my own*' (*Rox*, p.104).

The Dutch merchant initially appears as a somewhat crafty character himself, effortlessly extricating Roxana from the suspicion of murder. But in the course of their subsequent affair, he is more often her dupe. He assumes that sleeping with Roxana on several consecutive nights will lead inexorably to their marriage. She typically presents her disappointment of his intentions as a polished manoeuvre:

Thus his Project of coming to-Bed to me, was a Bite upon himself, while he intended it for a Bite upon me; and he was no nearer his Aim of marrying me, than he was before. (*Rox*, p. 144)

She has the knack of making threatening designs redound in her favour and against the rivals who have conceived them. While the merchant imagines that sleeping with Roxana is a guarantee of marriage, it in fact supplies her with the means of completely paying off her debts to him for having assisted her against the murder charge.

He drew himself into it, and tho' it was a dear Bargain, yet it was a Bargain of his own making; he cou'd not say I had trick'd him into it; but as he projected and drew me in to lye with him, depending that it was a sure Game in order to a Marriage, so I granted him the Favour, as he call'd it, to ballance the Account of Favours receiv'd from him. (*Rox*, p. 144)

Roxana savours the fact that he is being deprived of his best bargaining counter, the obligation due to him for his earlier efforts on her behalf, at exactly the moment when he believes that he is consolidating his grip on her. The genius of the manoeuvre lies in the way it has apparently been instigated by the merchant himself, who takes her to bed, even though Roxana turns it to her advantage.

Another example of Roxana's talent for manipulating her lovers, without being seen to do so, occurs later when she decides to ease herself out of an affair with an English lord. She offers a meticulous commentary on how she steered the lord towards the

decision which she desired, so that she might not be held responsible for the separation.

For example:

I took Occasion to be much less complaisant to him than I us'd to be; and as I knew him to be hasty, I first took care to put him into a little Passion, and then to resent it, and this brought us to Words; in which I told him, I thought he grew sick of me; and he answer'd; in a heat, that *truly so he was*; I answer'd, that I found his Lordship was endeavouring to *make me sick too*. (Rox, p. 199)

Roxana cleverly plants dissatisfaction in the lord, so that he is the first to admit to such feelings; her resentment then seems only a natural reaction to his change of heart. He appears to be actively disrupting the relationship, while Roxana 'begg'd his Lordship, he wou'd make himself easie' (Rox, p. 199). She concludes the episode with an insightful precis of her conduct:

This I spoke with an Air of Coldness and Indifference, such as I knew he cou'd not bear; but I did not downright quarrel with him, and tell him *I was sick of him too*, and desire him to quit me, for I knew that wou'd come of itself; besides, I had receiv'd a great-deal of handsome usage from him, and I was loth to have the Breach be on my Side, that he might not be able to say I was ungrateful. (Rox, p. 199)

A sudden outburst from Roxana might have brought the affair to a close, but her more calculating approach does so without exposing herself to any damaging accusations.¹⁵

The episodes which I have been discussing reveal Defoe seizing upon the popular caricature of the politically-inclined female as a pretext for elaborating new 'masterpieces' of management, outside an obviously political context. An episode from another of his low-life novels, *Colonel Jack*, published in the same year as *Moll Flanders*, affords an interesting comparison. On his return to London from Virginia, where he has risen from being a slave to a wealthy owner of three plantations, Jack suddenly finds himself the dupe

¹⁵ Blewett sees *Roxana* as Defoe's most typical novel, because it is the one in which the language of disguise and dissimulation, reflecting Defoe's 'profound sense of the cheats and shams and snares and betrayals of the lives of most men and women', is most pervasive: Blewett, pp. 133-45. But he seems to me to overlook the relish and curiosity which Defoe's protagonists display towards the artifices they adopt.

of the inscrutable 'Lady' whom he eventually marries. She clearly has her sight on Jack's fortune, but courts him in such a way that she seems quite indifferent towards him. Only in retrospect does he understand and respect her approach:

SHE attacked me without ceasing, with the fineness of her Conduct, and with Arts which were impossible to be ineffectual; she was ever, as it were, in my View; often in my Company, and yet kept herself so on the Reserve, so surrounded continually with Obstructions, that for several Months after she could perceive I sought an Opportunity to speak to her, she rendered it impossible, nor could I ever break in upon her, she kept her Guard so well. (*CJ*, p.187)

Defoe dresses Jack's account in the aesthetic jargon which he had once applied to political manoeuvres. There are the same exaggerated claims for the perfection and infallibility of a contrivance that appear in a work like the *White Staff*. The 'Lady' ensures that she is in Jack's company often enough to preoccupy him, but also contrives to be at a distance from him, never giving him an opportunity to be anything other than dependent upon her. She woos him relentlessly, but in a manner so oblique that she appears quite disinterested:

It was indeed a kind of a Catch, for she manag'd all by Art, and drew me in with the most resolute backwardness, that it was almost impossible not to be deceiv'd by it ...

SHE was too cunning to let me perceive how easie she was to be had; on the contrary she run all the hazards of bringing me to neglect her entirely, that one would think any Woman in the World could do. (*CJ*, p. 187)

Her method has the element of risk that is the cachet of a 'masterpiece': by taking her detachment so far, there is a danger of Jack losing interest, but there is also the possibility of her triumph being all the more cherishable. However, revealingly, Defoe does not allow her to carry off the manoeuvre successfully; she does take it over the brink.

SHE soon found she had gone too far with me; and in short, that she was extreamly out in her Politicks, that she had to do with one that was not listed yet among the whining Sort of Lovers ... she found that she had all her Game to play over again; that so absolute a Reservedness, even to Rudeness and Ill-Manners, was a little too much. (*CJ*, p. 189)

Defoe shies away from allowing her to bring the stratagem to fruition: she is not quite canny enough to outwit Jack in such style. However, Jack does go on to pay tribute to her

next tactic, as she adopts the forbidding, sober appearance of a woman much older than herself. She finally manoeuvres Jack into marriage, largely through the subtlety with which 'she made me effectually Court her, tho' at the same time in her Design she Courted me with the utmost Skill' (*CJ*, p. 193): a talent for concealing her own orchestration of events that Moll and Roxana also display. But Defoe seems determined that, although the marriage leaves his fortune somewhat depleted, Jack should emerge from the episode in the ascendant. The marriage collapses when the 'Lady' reveals that she is already pregnant, and they agree to separate. When Jack offers to take her back under certain conditions, she is obliged to delay her reply on account of being pregnant again by another man; but Jack is not fooled this time.

I was too many for her here too, my Intelligence about her was too good, for her to Conceal such an Affair from me ... for I had an Account to a Tittle, of the time when, and Place where, and the Creature of which she was deliver'd. (*CJ*, p. 207)

So, for all the praise heaped upon her management of Jack, the affair ends with him vaunting his confident anticipation of her designs. The episode assuredly exploits clichés about the presumptuous, independent woman: Jack twice refers to the 'Witch-Craft in the Conversation of this Woman' (*CJ*, p. 187), and encountering 'the Magick of a Genius capable to Deceive a more wary Capacity than mine' in a woman clearly takes him by surprise. But in a novel which has a male protagonist and narrator, she is only allowed to produce a few flashes of tactical genius before finally being outsmarted by Jack. In *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, however, part of their appeal for the eighteenth-century reader depends upon their female protagonists executing sophisticated political manoeuvres at the expense of the opposite sex. If their contrivances fail to secure them an advantageous marriage, it is more often from bad luck than the subtlety of their male rivals.

A number of critics have compared *Moll Flanders* with both typical criminal biographies and picaresque novels, and found that, despite being indebted to both genres,

the novel does not fit neatly into any single literary mould.¹⁶ Frank Wadleigh Chandler, in his pioneering conspectus of criminal literature, found Defoe's novels disappointing beside the classic examples of the Spanish picaresque:

That Defoe did not think it worth while to cull choicer frauds from the hundreds on record is evidence how little he cared for them. His interest lay not in the cheats but in the cheater, and less in the deeds of the cheater than in her conscience.¹⁷

I would dispute the last claim, but Chandler's remarks do attest to a widespread feeling that Defoe's handling of Moll's crimes is rather idiosyncratic. Defoe gives much more attention to some incidents than intrinsically they seem to deserve: as had earlier been the case in the *White Staff* pamphlets. Increasingly, the focus is upon how Moll evades apprehension, or makes the best of a botched job, rather than on the attempted crimes themselves.

Moll perpetrates a few petty thefts on her own initiative, but her peculiar concern with criminal technique begins when her governess introduces her to the supremely gifted thief who acts as her 'Tutor'. Henceforth, the lofty notion of crime as a perfectible 'Art' influences her activities. Moll still appears to subscribe to these values, as she recalls how her tutor removed gold watches 'so dexteriously that no Woman ever arriv'd to the Perfection of that Art, so as to do it like her' (*MF*, p. 201); and claims that in a while 'she had shewn me her Art, and I had several times unhook'd a Watch from her own side with great dexterity' (*MF*, p. 201). Thus,

in a little time, by the help of this Confederate I grew as impudent a Thief, and as dexterous as ever *Moll Cut-Purse* was, tho' if Fame does not belie her, not half so Handsome. (*MF*, p. 201)

¹⁶ See Robert Alter, *Rogue's Progress: Studies in the Picaresque Novel* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 35-57; Bjornson, pp. 108-204; Faller, p. 31.

¹⁷ Frank Wadleigh Chandler, *The Literature of Roguery*, 2 vols (London: A. Constable & Co.; Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1907), II, 290-1.

The final adjective could almost refer to her precursor's criminal performance as much as her physical appearance. Defoe was not alone in applying appreciative or aesthetic terms to criminal deeds: it was a commonplace of criminal literature. But, unlike other authors exploiting the genre, he had originally lavished this vocabulary upon political exploits: for Defoe, it was closely associated with a particular kind of political device, that served its intended purpose, but, even more importantly, left its perpetrator in a position of invulnerability. Almost inevitably, Moll's crimes become simply more graphic adaptations of the 'masterpiece of policy' that so fascinated Defoe.

Once she is thieving alone with success and aplomb, Moll displays a snobbish impatience with her fellow-criminals. She mocks one particular couple, insinuating that the predictability of their criminal methods is reflected in the inexorable, Hogarthian course which their lives follow, as they 'robbed together, lay together, were taken together, and at last were hang'd together' (*MF*, p. 209). In contrast, Moll and her tutor had excelled at working in tandem: the tutor would jostle a lady in a crowd, providing Moll with a split second to unhook her watch, and leaving the tutor to feign concern for the apprehension of the culprit. Moll observes the conduct of the two incompetents when she reluctantly collaborates with them on a few jobs:

Where I rather saw them commit some Coarse and unhandy Robberies, in which nothing but a great Stock of impudence on their Side, and gross Negligence on the Peoples Side who were robb'd, could have made them Successful. (*MF*, p. 209)

Moll's scruples are more aesthetic than moral. She similarly eschews anything as crude as house-breaking ('a thing out of my Way' (*MF*, p. 209)), and is not surprised to find the couple easily caught after their use of 'main Force' (*MF*, p. 209) to enter a watchmaker's shop. Moll expresses similar preferences when the governess encourages her to use a male disguise for a while, much to her frustration. She explains that

it was a long time before I could behave in my new Cloths: I mean, as to my Craft; it was impossible to be so Nimble, so Ready, so Dexterous at these things, in a Dress so contrary to Nature; and as I did every thing Clumsily, so I had neither

the success, or the easiness of Escape that I had before. (*MF*, pp. 214-5)

Moll is adamant that she works better alone:

For I was seldom in any Danger when I was by my self, or if I was, I got out of it with more Dexterity than when I was entangled with the dull Measures of other People, who had perhaps less forecast, and were more rash and impatient than I; for tho' I had as much Courage to venture as any of them, yet I used more caution before I undertook a thing, and had more Presence of Mind when I was to bring myself off. (*MF*, p. 220)

For Moll, acquiring the booty often appears to be secondary to undertaking the crime with sophistication and panache, and even to emerging from a failed attempt with a swagger. Dependence on others who are not given to her subdued approach prevents her from conducting a crime according to her own tastes and skills.¹⁸

Defoe seems to siphon his own political prejudices into Moll's strong views on crime. Her emphasis on subtlety and delicacy in performance rather than on a successful result, on the means rather than the end, squares with his recommendation of divide-and-rule rather than adversarial politics to Harley in 1704, and the attention given to the understated political manoeuvre in his various secret histories. He was already beginning to extend these principles into other areas of human activity towards the end of the *Review*. In an issue of July 1711, Defoe discusses the practice of 'BIRDING' at the Guildhall: the choosing of a candidate for Sheriff who is patently unqualified for the position and will almost certainly refuse to hold it, which enables the City authorities to profit from a four hundred pound fine imposed upon him. He compares this ruse unfavourably with the pick-pocket's practices:

¹⁸ On Moll's preference for forethought and technique over instinct and aggression, see Birdsall, p. 79; Martin Price, *To the Palace of Wisdom* (London: Garden City, N.Y., 1964), pp. 270-3; Richetti, *Situations and Structures*, pp. 126-30; John Rietz, 'Criminal Ms-Representation: *Moll Flanders* and Criminal Biography', *Studies in the Novel*, 23 (1991), 183-95, especially 184-5.

That is done like an Artist, there's some dexterity, *Leger-de-main*, and some cleaver [sic] Management in the Cheat; but this is the Slovenliest Fraud, the Clumsiest, Undress'd, bare-fac'd Violence, it has neither *say well* nor *do well* in it.

An impressive resourcefulness lies behind everyday '*Cheating*':

There are Hooks and Snares, Lies, false Smiles, canting Affirmations, and a Hundred Shop-Keeping, Sharping, Whedles [sic], muster'd together, to bring that to pass.¹⁹

But 'birding' is simply a blatant abuse of power against defenceless victims. In other issues of this period, Defoe denounces the stock-jobber's conspicuous exploitation of market forces. Pick-pocketing is a much greater challenge, demanding agility and illusion from the practitioner, if he is to outwit both the victim and the law: in other words, it is closer to the political frauds adopted by statesmen to defuse a crisis, which Defoe knew as 'masterpieces of policy'.

Defoe continues to explore this same preference for guile over crude force or obvious deception beyond his novels. In *The Political History of the Devil*, he seizes upon the detail that when Satan fell from Heaven and ceased to be an angel, God placed him under a 'Restraint ... a general Prohibition, to do any thing to the prejudice of this Creation, or to act any thing by Force or Violence without special Permission'. Thus, Satan has no choice but to resort to the style of management that Defoe had favoured during his period of political activity. He reiterates this point at several junctures in the work. After Satan has capped God's miracle of dividing the Red Sea with the contrivance of setting up a golden calf for worship on Mount Sinai, Defoe reflects on his confident exploitation of human weaknesses:

Take it with you as you go, 'tis always *by Stratagem*, never *by Force*; a Proof that he is not empower'd to use Violence: He may Tempt, and he does prevail; but 'tis all *Legerdemain*, 'tis all Craft and Artifice ... ever since he has had any thing to do with Mankind, he has practis'd upon them with Stratagem and Cunning; also 'tis observable that he has carried his Point better that way than he would have done

¹⁹ *Review*, VIII, 194b, 195a.

by Fury and Violence, if he had been allowed to make use of it ... his Business is to make Men *sin*, not to make them *suffer*; to make *Devils* of them, not *Saints*; to delude them, and draw them away from their Maker, not send them away to him; and therefore he works by Stratagem, not by Force.²⁰

Defoe's version of the Devil's story at times comes close to being surreptitious propaganda for his favoured brand of politics. The section of *Moll Flanders* devoted to crime must be read in the context of Defoe's persistent attachment to 'Stratagem' over 'Force'.

Defoe's fascination with the digestion of political tactics also colours the criminal episodes of *Moll Flanders*. On a number of occasions the robbery seems to serve more as the pretext for meticulous reflections upon Moll's evasion of the law than as a matter of interest in itself. When she steals a golden watch from two young sisters walking in St. James's Park, she offers a commentary on her conduct. She describes how her small talk elicited 'abundance of things enough for my business' (*MF*, p. 258) from their footman, and how she then stole their watch while helping them to an advantageous position from which to watch the King's procession along the Mall, before exploiting the jostling crowd to make her getaway. It is a characteristic crime, relying on strategies of distraction that ensure that she is unsuspected by her victims or any possible witnesses. Moll concludes the episode by reflecting on the tactics that were available to her:

I WAS once of the mind to venture staying with Lady *Betty*, till she mist the Watch, and so have made a great Out-cry about it with her, and have got her into her Coach, and put my self in the Coach with her, and have gone Home with her; for she appear'd so fond of me, and so perfectly deceiv'd by my so readily talking to her of all her Relations and Family, that I thought it was very easy to push the thing farther, and to have got at least the Neck-lace of Pearl; but when I consider'd that tho' the Child would not perhaps have suspected me, other People might, and that if I was search'd I should be discover'd; I thought it was best to go off with what I had got, and be satisfy'd. (*MF*, p. 259)

Moll is prone to weighing up alternative strategies in this way, ascertaining which course was most likely to guarantee her continued security. Such passages tend to overshadow the momentary act of theft.

²⁰ *The Political History of the Devil*, pp. 97-8, 173-4.

The success or failure of the crime is often secondary to Moll's gift for emerging from a potentially compromising situation with her respectability unscathed. She describes how she tried to seize a gold watch from a gentleman in a crowded meeting-house, apparently relishing the attempt all the more because it was made in circumstances 'where I was in very great Danger of being taken' (*MF*, p. 211). The point of the episode for Moll lies not in the failed attempt but the ease with which she instantly prevents any suspicion of herself. As soon as she realizes that the watch will not come, she cries out, making herself the near-victim of an imaginary assault. She carefully allows a distance to form between herself and the victim, and her cry also prompts more cries ahead of her. The confusion into which she throws bystanders and potential witnesses enables her to go undetected. It is a physical enactment of Moll's general desire to keep at one remove from the people she deals with, avoiding dependence or culpability. It also has the piquant irony which Moll demands from her contrivances: she derives security from the confusion into which she throws bystanders. The whole manoeuvre is broken down into its component parts, and her victim's naivety measured against her own subtlety:

For she, when she felt the pull scream'd out, and push'd herself forward, and put all the People about her into disorder, but said not a Word of her Watch, or of a *Pick-pocket*, for at least two Minutes time, which was time enough for me, and to spare; for as I had cried out behind her, *as I have said*, and bore myself back in the Crowd as she bore forward, there were several People, at least seven or eight, the Throng being still moving on, that were got between me and her in that time, and then I crying out *a Pick-pocket*, rather sooner than she, or at least as soon, she might as well be the Person suspected as I, and the People were confus'd in their Enquiry; whereas, had she with a Presence of Mind needful on such an Occasion, as soon as she felt the pull, not skream'd out as she did, but turn'd immediately round, and seiz'd the next Body that was behind her, she had infallibly taken me. (*MF*, p. 212)

The episode enacts physically the Machiavellian tactic of keeping at several removes from those whom one exploits and casting responsibility for one's manoeuvres onto their very victims: as Moll observes, the woman whom she tried to rob 'might as well be the Person suspected as I'. Defoe's debt to popular political literature also seems evident in the

rigorous scrutiny which Moll gives to both her own devices and the woman's tactical shortcomings. In the role of impartial expert, she offers hints on how the woman should have responded, even how she might have emulated Moll in rendering herself invulnerable.²¹

This preoccupation with tactics lies behind the brief episode which is perhaps the most puzzling in the criminal section of the book: Moll's failure to steal successfully a horse that has been entrusted to her by a drawer outside a tavern. Moll is quite content to expose her own shortcomings as a thief: how she brought the horse back to her governess, only to realize that it would be almost impossible to dispose of such obviously stolen property to their advantage. They decide to leave the horse at an inn and to send a note to the tavern explaining that it has been left there. Moll's final comment on the affair is that 'this was a Robbery and no Robbery, for little was lost by it, and nothing was got by it' (*MF*, p. 254); which might beg the question of why she has bothered relating it in the first place. But although she fails to gain from the theft, she carries off a kind of strategic feat in devising a 'remedy' in circumstances 'which had like to have cost me dear' (*MF*, p. 254). The significance of the episode lies in Moll's and the governess's skill in quickly recovering their immunity to the law, after an error that had threatened to incriminate them.

On her own admission, Moll is more interested in crime as a dramatic projection of abstract tactics than in solidarity with her fellow thieves:

This is a Direction not of the kindest Sort to the Fraternity; but 'tis certainly a Key to the Clue of a *Pick-pockets* Motions, and whoever can follow it, will as certainly catch the Thief as he will be sure to miss if he does not. (*MF*, p. 213)

²¹ Faller observes that Defoe's presentation of crime is 'more circumstantial and slower moving' than it is in conventional criminal literature: Faller, p. 146. Richetti too reflects on *Moll Flanders*'s general 'tendency towards extended meditation on the nature of action rather than the mere description of action itself: *Situations and Structures*, p. 105.

At moments like this, the novel becomes a kind of manual, disclosing the *arcana* of street crime rather than of court intrigue.²² The Preface claims that the account of Moll's crimes serves 'as so many warnings to honest People to beware of them, intimating to them by what Methods innocent People are drawn in, plunder'd and robb'd, and by Consequence how to avoid them' (*MF*, p. 4). Moll similarly insists on the wider relevance of her account:

Every Branch of my Story, if duly consider'd, may be useful to honest People, and afford a due Caution to People of some sort or other to Guard against the like Surprizes, and to have their Eyes about them when they have to do with Strangers of any kind, for 'tis very seldom that some Snare or other is not in their way. (*MF*, p. 268)

As Defoe has Moll apply the analytical approach of Machiavellian literature to her crimes and escapes, these claims for the novel's instructive function seem less like an attempt to satisfy a particular section of his audience and more ingenuous statements of fact. The novel's debt to the political manual needs to be borne in mind when Moll harangues those who fall prey to her deceptions: such as the mother who allowed her daughter to walk home alone from dancing-school with a valuable necklace, or the drunken baronet who solicits Moll at Bartholomew Fair. Defoe's fascination both with techniques of eluding accountability and with possible precautions against these is largely responsible for Moll's sanctimonious rhetoric; although incidentally it also accords with and deepens Moll's devious character, as if she is now even attempting to persuade the reader of her moral respectability, covering up the tracks which she has so zestfully exposed.

Given Moll's predilections, it is no surprise to find her showing an interest in the more unorthodox and ingenious forms of crime. Early on in her account, she recalls how she led a Custom-House officer and a constable to a hoard of contraband Flanders lace, about which her Governess has tipped her off. As the lace can only be reached by Moll

²² Kay sees the criminal episodes constituting 'a negative conduct book': *Political Constructions*, p. 115.

through a narrow hole, she is able to accomplish the feat of simultaneously collaborating with and defying the law:

I squeez'd myself into it with a Candle in my Hand, and so reach'd the Peices out to him, taking care as I gave him some, so to secure as much about myself as I could conveniently Dispose of: There was near 300*l.* worth of Lace in the whole; and I secur'd about 50*l.* worth of it to myself. (*MF*, p. 210)

Moll then arranges to meet the officer to discuss her reward, after she has had time to conceal the lace that she has stolen. She is scrupulous in allowing him to feel that he is taking the initiative, meeting him 'at a House of his own directing' (*MF*, p. 210). But when they come to the reward, she indulges in some hard bargaining, refusing to settle for his initial offer of twenty pounds. Eventually, she gains fifty pounds in cash and a piece of lace worth '8 or 9 Pound' (*MF*, p. 210), the latter being a particularly impudent request, considering that she has already filched fifty pounds worth of the stuff. Moll typically concludes the anecdote with a self-satisfied appraisal of her contrivance:

Nor did he ever know who I was, or where to enquire for me; so that if it had been discover'd, that part of the Goods were embezzel'd; he could have made no Challenge upon me for it. (*MF*, pp. 210-11)

Moll has made a profit at the hands of the authorities, and still kept herself at a sufficient distance to avoid being held to account for her deception. Moll admits that 'I found that this last was the best, and easiest sort of Work that was in my way' (*MF*, p. 211) and looks for further opportunities to profit from prohibited goods. Moll seems to feel more comfortable with a practice that enables her to exercise her talent for seizing the main chance while maintaining an appearance of disinterested good nature, than with ordinary theft. But she also seems to enjoy the challenge of committing a crime in the presence of the authorities: it demands that she prove herself 'a very dexterous Manager in the nicest Cases' (*MF*, p. 211).

Moll indulges in the similar practice of returning stolen goods after she has filched several items from the drunken baronet. The greater part of her account of the episode is

devoted to the ensuing plot on which she and her governess collaborate. The governess first displays 'an admirable Address' (*MF*, p. 231) in reassuring the baronet that she is 'doing him a Service' (*MF*, p. 231) while simultaneously arousing his sense of insecurity. Even while she insists on her disinterestedness, she implies that she alone possesses a potentially compromising titbit: 'that there was no Body in the World but herself and him that were acquainted with it, no not the very Person that was with him' (*MF*, p. 231). She returns his property, but is careful to 'leave the valuing it to himself' (*MF*, p. 234): the kind of indirect extortion at which Moll usually excels. She plays her part with impressive assurance, making it clear that she knows enough to ruin his reputation, but appearing to be at one remove from Moll herself: she claims to have heard about the baronet's experience (in Moll's words) 'from one that I had told the whole Story to, and that was to help me dispose of the Goods' (*MF*, pp. 234-5), which is in fact the very role the governess herself has played. Even after she has admitted to knowing Moll, she continues to depict herself as a disinterested go-between.

Since the governess has dealt with the matter of returning the stolen goods for a fee, Moll is able to appear before the baronet in a more innocent guise, and pursue further gain. After the inevitable night together, Moll carries off a typical feat, eliciting a statement from the baronet that he has not been robbed, only for him to then reward her with five guineas. Thus, she insures against the charge of theft, and then draws a further sum from him more indirectly. She does not win the steady maintenance from him that she had hoped for, but her preference is clearly for this kind of protracted manipulation, rather than the momentary act of robbery.

One of the most detailed episodes in this section of the novel follows a crime that Moll did not even commit, as she exploits her wrongful apprehension by a mercer and a journeyman after a break-in at their shop. The elaborate horse-trading between the attorneys representing Moll and the mercer, as each is at pains to avoid putting their respective clients at a disadvantage, is the main excuse for the episode.

What distinguishes Moll's account of her career as a thief from conventional criminal or picaresque literature is its overwhelming concern with the tactics adopted before or after a crime, and with the evasion of arrest, rather than with the deed itself. Moll's summary of her career is worth noting:

I grew the greatest Artist of my time, and work'd myself out of every Danger with such Dexterity, that when several more of my Comrades run themselves into *Newgate* presently, and by that time they had been Half a Year at the Trade, I had now Practis'd upwards of five Year, and the People at *Newgate*, did not so much as know me; they had heard much of me indeed, and often expected me there, but I always got off, tho' many times in the extreamest Danger. (*MF*, p. 214)

Moll estimates her skill as a thief by the length of time for which she eludes the authorities, as if defying probability, not by the loot she has gained. But the novel's debt to the Puritan spiritual biography demands that she should also seem to be moving inexorably towards capture and subsequent penitence. The paradox is encapsulated in Moll's reference to Newgate as 'the Place that had so long expected me, and which with so much Art and Success I had so long avoided' (*MF*, p. 273). *Moll Flanders* in fact shares similar tensions to the *White Staff* pamphlets: both Oxford and Moll carry off virtuoso manoeuvres, that seem to make their positions inviolable, but from the start we know that they will not ultimately transcend the familiar instability of human affairs.

But if Defoe satisfies the moral-religious dimension to the novel by having Moll punished and made repentant, he still allows her to treat penitence in a way that is entirely consistent with her character up to that point: as a means of retaining an appearance of moral respectability *despite* her manifold deceptions and crimes. The nature of Moll's penitence is better understood by first examining the role played by her governess.

Before Moll embarks on her criminal career, the governess appears primarily in the role of midwife. The associations which this profession may have had for eighteenth-century readers have been much speculated upon by critics.²³ Its main significance for

²³ See Robert Erickson, *Mother Midnight* (New York: AMS Press, 1986), pp. 45-68.

Defoe, however, is perhaps suggested by Moll's remark on a precursor of the governess, her landlady in Bath who relieves her of an earlier child: she undertook to 'bring us off with Reputation, and she did so very dexterously indeed' (*MF*, p. 117). The Governess is similarly distinguished by her skill in enabling her clients to dispose of their illegitimate offspring and resume their lives with their respectability unimpaired. A woman's appearance before society is all that matters: she reasons away Moll's conventional objections to marrying one man while she is still strictly bound to another, claiming that 'to have a Husband that cannot appear is to have no Husband' (*MF*, p. 162). The governess is equally adept at passing herself off as a reputable member of society, even to a client like Moll. She delicately suggests the possibility of an abortion, but then smartly backtracks when Moll is about to take offence. Retrospectively, Moll appreciates the manoeuvre:

To do her Justice, she put it off so cleverly, that I cou'd not say she really intended it, or whether she only mentioned the practise as a horrible thing; for she couch'd her words so well, and took my meaning so quickly, that she gave her Negative before I could explain my self. (*MF*, p. 169)

She makes the offer so elliptically that Moll cannot even begin to use her words as grounds for an accusation of immorality. Moll also admits to a sneaking admiration for the impudent confidence with which the governess palms off an illicit maternity ward onto the public as a respectable business.

By this she kept up the Reputation, such as it was, of her Business, and obtain'd this Character, that tho' she did take Care of the Women when they were Debauch'd, yet she was not Instrumental to their being Debauch'd at all; and yet it was a wicked Trade she drove too. (*MF*, p. 170)

The last clause is crucial to what appeals to Moll. It is not just that the governess ensures that her house, in public knowledge at least, never crosses the fine line between a lying-in hospital and a brothel, as she helps relieve women of their shame, while keeping herself at one remove from the causes of their condition; but that she inveigles society into respecting a livelihood that is actually 'wicked'. Moll's use of Defoe's favourite conjunction

'and yet' alerts the reader to the kind of manipulative feat that had fascinated her creator in a political context.

The state of penitence which Moll claims that her governess reaches at about the same time as her own is simply the last, most audacious of her attempts to project herself as a decent, pious old spinster. Defoe's Preface regrets that the novel cannot allow more space to the varied career of the governess:

who had run thro', it seems in a few Years all the eminent degrees of a Gentlewoman, a Whore, and a Bawd; a Midwife, and a Midwife-keeper, as *they are call'd*, a Pawn-broker, a Child-taker, a Receiver of Thieves, and of Thieves purchase, that is to say, of stolen Goods; and in a Word, her self a Thief, a Breeder up of Thieves, and the like, and yet at last a Penitent. (*MF*, p. 5)

Defoe relishes the way she has adopted so many contradictory roles ('Gentlewoman' and 'Whore', 'Midwife' and 'Child-taker', 'Receiver of Thieves' and 'Breeder up of Thieves') within one lifetime, without ever making herself vulnerable to censure. To appear finally as a penitent in society's eyes, after such a catalogue of opprobrious trades, is her crowning manoeuvre. When the governess undergoes penitence in the course of the narrative, Moll claims that she is brought to the point of death through her spiritual turmoil. Moll is required to be taken in by her artifice to some extent, if only to attest to its brilliance. But her account of the governess's behind-the-scenes efforts to have her released and later transported in comfort reveal her mentor to be as calculating as ever. For example, when the minister who is apparently responsible for Moll's penitence expresses concern that Moll might be transported with a dissolute crowd, the governess immediately spots how this might be turned to Moll's advantage: 'and as soon as the Minister was gone, she told me, she would not have me discourag'd, for perhaps ways and means might be found out to dispose of me in a particular way, by my self, of which she would talk farther to me afterward' (*MF*, p. 294). She seems to have in mind exploiting the minister's fears to secure a pardon for Moll (as is hinted later), rather than her protege's spiritual welfare.

Moll's penitence, like much of her behaviour, mirrors that of her governess. It

allows her to quickly recover the respectability which so many of her manoeuvres have worked to maintain, and promises the possibilities of release, or at least transportation abroad, where she can keep her criminal past at a distance.²⁴ Moll exposes the sheer convenience of her penitence on a number of occasions. She highlights her deception of the minister, admitting that she had concurred disingenuously with his reservations about her transportation only in the hope that this would make him more favourable towards the proposal:

I really was not so solicitous about it as I was before, but I industriously conceal'd my Reasons for it from the Minister, and to the last he did not know, but that I went with the utmost reluctance and affliction. (*MF*, p. 306)

Moll seems more concerned with upholding an impression of remorse and self-knowledge until her final meeting with the minister, than with the experience of penitence.

Transportation is primarily an opportunity to be exploited to her advantage. She tries to convince Jemmy, who has resigned to facing the gallows, that

if he was Transported, there might be an Hundred ways for him that was a Gentleman, and a bold enterprizing Man to find his way back again, and perhaps some Ways and Means to come back before he went. (*MF*, p.301)

It is an excuse to resume the pursuit of prosperity by manoeuvre and evasion, whether in England again or in Virginia.

Virginia has a similar significance in *Moll Flanders* to the initially uninhabited island in *Crusoe*: as a haven from the Hobbesian state of nature that is modern society. While the deserted island is for Crusoe an opportunity to discover the value of ingenuity and subtlety before he has to manage human rivals, for Moll it is an almost idyllic relief from the incessant manoeuvring to which she has been resorting almost from childhood, to

²⁴ For convincing arguments against taking Moll's repentance at face value, see Curtis, *The Elusive Daniel Defoe*, pp.154-7; Robert Bell, 'Moll's Grace Abounding', *Genre*, 8 (1975), 267-82.

preserve the independence and reputation necessary to survive in human society. She envisages it as a place

where we should look back upon all our past Disasters with infinite Satisfaction, when we should consider that our Enemies should entirely forget us, and that we should live as new People in a new World, no Body having any thing to say to us, or we to them. (*MF*, p. 304)

Rival interests simply will not need to be considered. It is true that she is obliged to use some calculation to tidy up affairs at her mother's (and brother's) estate: she tells Jemmy about her family plantation, but keeps him remote from her brother and son; while her son Humphry proves to be very much his mother's son, contriving with Moll to keep her arrival secret from her brother-husband. But the latter's death facilitates the unravelling of this final intrigue, so that Moll finally seems to attain a security that does not require to be defended through outlandish political tactics: 'Thus all these little Difficulties were made easy, and we liv'd together with the greatest Kindness and Comfort imaginable' (*MF*, p.342).

The theme of maintaining a facade of respectability in spite of one's actions is explored further in *Roxana*.²⁵ Towards the end of the novel, Defoe even questions the logic and efficacy of Roxana's manoeuvring, as he had Oxford's in the third *White Staff* pamphlet. The theme manifests itself in Roxana's desire to be a member of high society, while still profiting from illicit affairs with men like the prince and the Dutch merchant. While she discusses how best to invest her fortune with the economist and careerist Whig politician Sir Robert Clayton, she appears as a respectable, well-healed, if eccentrically '*Amazonian*' lady.

²⁵ Richetti has noted 'the balance Roxana manages between circumstances and manipulation', her ability to move within respectable society and yet detach herself from it enough to control those who are caught up in it: *Situations and Structures*, p. 215.

But Sir *Robert* knew nothing of my Design; that I aim'd at being a kept Mistress, and to have a handsome Maintenance; and that I was still for getting Money, *and laying it up too*, as much as he could desire me, only by a worse Way. (*Rox*, p. 169)

Clayton is impressed by her self-assurance and financial acumen,

but he neither knew, or mistrusted, that with all this Wealth, I was yet a Whore, and was not averse to adding to my Estate at the farther Expence of my Virtue. (*Rox*, p. 171)

Clayton, who had earned a popular reputation for deviousness, is described by Roxana as 'a Man thorowly vers'd in Arts of improving Money' (*Rox*, p. 169). He seems to stand as a kind of financial equivalent to the Machiavellian statesman.²⁶ Defoe no doubt intends the appeal of this episode to lie in the spectacle of a woman outstripping such a man at his own deceptive practices. Roxana relishes the fact that Clayton is handling her money without an inkling of how disreputably it has been acquired.

Increasingly, Roxana is exercised by the challenge of preventing her past exploits from encroaching upon her present prosperity. It is a variation on the Machiavellian skill of evading accountability for one's actions. When Roxana is making a tidy profit from her affair with the prince, the unexpected appearance of her first husband as a French guard poses a threat to her position. In an effort to ensure that he is kept at one remove from her new way of life, she hires a Frenchman 'who was completely qualified for the Work of a Spy, (for *France* has plenty of such People)' (*Rox*, p. 94) to monitor his movements: a

²⁶ No consensus has been reached by critics on how Defoe viewed Clayton. Bram Dijkstra claims that Defoe admires him and makes him the mouthpiece for his own economic views: see *Roxana: Defoe and Economics* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987), pp. 53-5, 171-3, 223. J.R. Moore suggests that Clayton was more a figure of notoriety for Defoe, and that *Roxana* alludes to a forgery scandal of 1687 involving Clayton and a Mrs. Butler, former mistress to the Duke of Buckingham: see *Defoe in the Pillory and Other Studies* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Publications, 1939), pp. 44-9. I incline to Moore's view, although I am not convinced that Defoe has in mind a particular episode in Clayton's career.

detail that invites a political analogy. Roxana goes on to evaluate her agent's service in a manner that recalls the kind of political literature that had originated in France:

He did his Business so exquisitely punctual, that this poor Man scarce went out of the House, without my knowing the Way he went, the Company he kept, when he went Abroad, and when he stay'd at Home. (*Rox*, pp. 94-5)

Such an exhaustive knowledge of her husband's whereabouts puts Roxana in the position of near-invulnerability that she craves.

Later in the novel, Roxana's daughter by this husband, Susan, proves far more problematic. She dimly remembers seeing Roxana appearing in a Turkish dress at a decadent party held at her mistress's house, a detail that evokes Roxana's dissolute period in London before she settles down as wife to the Dutch merchant. Thus, to keep her infamous past a secret from her new husband, it is imperative to keep Susan also at bay. It is her servant Amy who first devises a means of detaching herself from this earlier phase of her life. Amy sells it to her mistress as a kind of tactical 'masterpiece':

At last, *Amy*, who was a clever Manager in such Cases, came to me with a Scheme, as she call'd it; I have found it out, Madam, *says she*; I have found a Scheme how you shall, if you have a-mind to it, begin, and finish a perfect entire Change of your Figure and Circumstances, in one Day; and shall be as much unknown, Madam, in twenty-four Hours, as you wou'd be in so many Years. (*Rox*, p. 209)

When the plan is revealed, that Roxana should move in with a Quaker family at a house in the Minories, it perhaps seems rather bathetic after Amy's grand claims for her brainchild. But once Roxana has followed the contrivance, she extols it in similar fashion:

I was now in a perfect Retreat indeed; remote from the Eyes of all that ever had seen me, and as much out of the way of being ever seen or heard-of by any of the Gang that us'd to follow me, as if I had been among the Mountains in *Lancashire*. (*Rox*, p. 211)

Here, Amy and Roxana are the mouthpieces for Defoe's attachment to the hyperbolic delivery adopted in political literature to describe the most successful manoeuvres. Emphasis is placed upon the ease with which the scheme achieves the impossible and its

infallibility. As in some of Defoe's political writing, the style in which the stratagem is commended seems more important than its substance.

The comic appeal of Quakers for Defoe lies in their ability to display a gift for manipulation while apparently remaining committed to absolute honesty and non-violence. This reputation precludes the possibility of conspicuous fraud or force: like Satan, they must from necessity resort to the more circumspect and surreptitious means of survival that fascinate and amuse Defoe. Roxana's Quaker has no objection to deceiving Susan on her friend's behalf, as long as she is not seen to be lying. This is particularly useful to Roxana, because it ensures that she is almost obliged to keep her past from the Quaker.

That she might be able to say boldly to the Creature, if she came, she did not know where I was gone, she desir'd I wou'd not let her know; and to make her Ignorance the more absolutely safe to herself, and likewise to me, I allow'd her to say, that she heard us talk of going to *Newmarket*, &c. (*Rox*, p. 302-3)

Roxana can keep her past intrigues and current movements as inscrutable to the Quaker as they are to Susan. On another occasion when the Quaker keeps Susan in the dark, Roxana remarks:

Indeed she serv'd me in it, more than I let her know she did; *in a word*, she thwarted the Girl so cleverly, that if she had known the whole Affair, she cou'd not have done it better. (*Rox*, p. 281)

The Quaker carries through her designs to keep Susan at a distance, but without understanding the significance of Susan for Roxana. The Quaker is not consistently so helpful to Roxana: her refusal to lie obviously or consciously makes it impossible for her to be depended on in every case, and occasionally she comes close to fuelling rather than diverting the speculation of Susan and others about whether her friend is the fabled 'Roxana'. But Defoe nevertheless uses her as another focus for his Machiavellian interests. For example, when Susan suddenly appears at Roxana's house at Woodford, causing Roxana to hide at a neighbour's, the Quaker responds to the danger of Susan staying locally for the night with an equivalent to the political 'masterpiece':

On a sudden Thought, she offer'd a bold Stroke, which tho' dangerous if it had happen'd wrong, had its desir'd Effect ... This was a cunning, tho' a dangerous Step, and it succeeded accordingly, for it amus'd the Creature entirely, and she presently concluded, that really I could not be there then. (*Rox*, p. 321)

Her contrivance is to tell Susan that she is welcome to stay at Roxana's house. But the language in which it is appraised is of more significance, directly echoing the 'BOLD STROKES' which Defoe had attributed to Oxford at the start of the third *White Staff* tract. The Quaker's inspired reaction is offered (a little incongruously) as just such a dare-devil manoeuvre, being all the more appealing for the possibility that it might backfire disastrously.

Much has been written about the murder of Susan by Amy, which Defoe seems to expect the reader to infer from the narrative. I would suggest that it serves at least partly to illustrate the consequences of Roxana's lapse in Machiavellian principles, in allowing Amy, who has been so intimate with her past exploits, freedom from the condition of dependence which is essential to keeping rival interests subordinate to your own. Defoe does not make it clear whether Amy is responsible for Susan's death, because what primarily concerns him towards the end of the novel is Roxana's paranoid speculation about the dangers of letting a former dependent out of her sight. She is acutely aware of her mistake as soon as she has made it:

Then I consider'd too, that *Amy* knew all the Secret history of my Life; had been in all the Intrigues of it, and been a Party in both Evil and Good, and at best, there was no Policy in it; that *as* it was very ungenerous and unkind to run Things to such an Extremity with her ... *so* it must be only her steady Kindness to me, and an excess of generous Friendship for me, that shou'd keep her from ill-using me in return for it; which ill-using me was enough in her power, and might be my utter Undoing. (*Rox*, p. 317)

In short, Roxana is now dependent upon Amy. The passage betrays several vestiges of Defoe's political concerns: Amy's knowledge of Roxana's past is comparable to the contents of a Machiavellian literary work, that discloses and exaggerates the manoeuvres of a particular statesman, like Defoe's own *Secret History of the White Staff*. By allowing

the person whom she has described as 'my Privy-Counsellor' (*Rox*, p. 242) to pursue her interest independently, Roxana seems to be inviting the kind of deception that Richelieu practised upon Mary de Medici, or Oxford upon Godolphin, each supplanting the senior figure to whom they owed their original promotion.

However, *Roxana's* relation to Defoe's Machiavellian preoccupations is more complicated than those of *Crusoe* or *Moll Flanders*. Increasingly towards the end of the narrative, the crafty management which Roxana has relied upon to preserve her interest seems to fail her. This is perhaps partly a symptom of the pressure being exerted upon the narrative by its generic debt to the Puritan spiritual autobiography. Roxana finds proof of Providence's justice in the fact

that the most secret Crimes are, by the most unforeseen Accidents, brought to Light, and discover'd ... that the Crime going before, the Scandal is certain to follow; and that 'tis not in the Power of humane Nature to conceal the first, or avoid the last. (*Rox*, pp. 297-8)

These statements seem to deny Roxana's earlier confidence that she can follow her interest by devious means without ever compromising her appearance of respectability. The novel's obligation to show that human vices cannot be disguised nor their repercussions evaded is directly at odds with Defoe's private fascinations.

But Defoe does also seem to be quite consciously exploring the limitations of the political management which he foists upon his fictional protagonist for much of the novel. When Roxana finds herself unexpectedly standing beside Susan at a dinner arranged by her friend the ship's captain, she loses the cool necessary to execute the kind of miraculous contrivance that might restore her invulnerability.

I was in the utmost Extremity, between so many particular Circumstances as lay upon me; for I was to conceal my Disorder from every-body, at the utmost Peril, and at the same time expected every-body would discern it; I was to expect she wou'd discover that she knew me, and yet was, by all means possible, to prevent it; I was to conceal myself, if possible, and yet had not the least room to do any-thing towards it; *in short*, there was no retreat; no shifting any-thing off; no avoiding or preventing her having a full Sight of me; nor was there any counterfeiting my

Voice, for then my Husband wou'd have perceiv'd it; *in short*, there was not the least Circumstance that offer'd me any Assistance, or any favourable thing to help me in this Exigence. (*Rox*, p. 278)

Roxana's proximity to Susan and her husband leaves her, both literally and tactically, no room for manoeuvre. Her usual measures for eluding accountability to others are quite inadequate in these circumstances: she is at the mercy of fortune. Later, when Roxana has manoeuvred her husband into sending a message through an acquaintance to the captain, explaining that they will not be able to join him on a journey as planned, Roxana is momentarily overcome with revulsion at her habitual manipulation of her husband.

How did my Blood flush up into my Face! when I reflected how sincerely, how affectionately this good-humour'd Gentleman embrac'd the most cursed Piece of Hypocrisie that ever came into the Arms of an honest Man? His was all Tenderness, all Kindness, and the utmost Sincerity; Mine all Grimace and Deceit; a Piece of meer Manage, and fram'd Conduct, to conceal a pass'd Life of Wickedness, and prevent his discovering, that he had in his Arms a She-Devil. (*Rox*, pp. 300-1)

Moll fleetingly displays remorse at her past, but never attacks so directly her methods of deception, never scorns her frequent recourse to 'meer Manage'. The ambivalence towards political intrigue which had been forced upon Defoe by his duties to a government minister reappears in *Roxana* as the narrative bends to the need to show the protagonist undergoing agonies of guilt and shame.

A political subtext has always seemed to lurk beneath *Crusoe*, as its protagonist manifestly conceives of himself as a sovereign of some sort on the island. But *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* have appeared to be further removed from Defoe's political background. In fact, they reflect Defoe's debt to popular Machiavellian literature more thoroughly than the earlier novel. The two female narrators are much more inclined to take measure of their contrivances in the discerning, fastidious manner which political lives and manuals were wont to adopt when recounting a 'masterpiece of policy'. Passages in *Moll Flanders* in particular, where Moll recalls with gusto her manipulation of a potential husband or her clean escape from near-apprehension, are the closest parallels to Defoe's

celebration of Oxford's political management in the *White Staff* pamphlets to be found in his fiction. Defoe makes his female characters repositories for his political preferences as diligently as he had unloaded them onto Tory high-fliers in his earlier political writing, the familiar stereotype of the female politician coming pat to his purpose. Along with *Mesnager*, these two novels are arguably his most successful attempts to explore political intrigue and capitalize on its popular appeal, while distracting the reader from his personal enthusiasm for the subject.

APPENDIX:

Defoe and Jonathan Wild.

This appendix discusses two Lives of the notorious 'Thief-Taker General' Jonathan Wild, which have been attributed to Defoe: *The Life of Jonathan Wild, from his Birth to his Death ... by H.D. Late Clerk to Justice R___*, published in May 1725; and *The True and Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of the Late Jonathan Wild*, published in June 1725. The latter was the first to be attributed to Defoe, by the Victorian biographer William Lee, who was convinced that Defoe had formed a close working relationship with its celebrated publisher, John Applebee. The attribution of the earlier pamphlet was made much later, but seemed to follow naturally from the first. But recently P.N. Furbank and W.R. Owens have made the long-overdue observation that there is not a scrap of external evidence for Defoe's association with Applebee.¹ No Defoe critic who takes the matter of attribution seriously can assume any longer that these two Lives are by Defoe. However, the somewhat Machiavellian characterization of Wild in these two works makes it necessary for me to offer some remarks on them. My purpose here is not to defend, but to account for their attribution to Defoe.

Defoe's most explicit references to Wild appear in *The Political History of the Devil*, a work whose supernatural subject-matter allows Defoe to indulge his Machiavellian propensities more exhaustively than would have been possible in a political tract. Early on in the book, Defoe remarks playfully on Satan's angelic origins, which still make him superior to the most noble-born men:

What he may be fallen to, is *one thing*, but what he is fallen from, is *another*, and therefore I must tell my learned and reverend friend *J.W. LLD.* when he spoke so rudely of *the Devil* lately, in my Opinion he abus'd his betters.

¹ See Furbank and Owens, *The Canonisation of Daniel Defoe*, pp. 72-4.

At the other end of the book, a discussion of Satan's role in human crime prompts an analogy with Wild:

In other Cases he may encourage them in these little Frauds and Cheats, and give them leave ... to make Use of his Name to bring them afterwards, and by Degrees to have a real Acquaintance with him; so bringing the Jest of their Trade into Earnest, till at length prompting them to commit some great Villany, to secure them to be his own, by their very Fear of his leaving them to be exposed to the World; thus he puts a *Johnathan Wild* upon them, and makes them be the very Wretches they only pretended to be before.²

Wild is associated with the same manipulative technique which Defoe attributes to Satan and which derives from Machiavellian politics. These allusions are not surprising in a work that was published in 1726, and so must have been written in the immediate aftermath of Wild's execution in May 1725, when a number of pamphlets, plays and squibs concerning him were in circulation. But the second passage in particular bespeaks a curiosity about Wild's success at making it in the interests of all criminals to subordinate themselves to him.

More generally, Defoe's low-life novels suggest his interest in the practice of dealing in stolen goods at which Wild excelled. In *Moll Flanders*, Moll describes how the 'Night-Flyers' (MF, p. 326) who obtained permission through bribery to leave Newgate every evening and commit new crimes

furnished those honest People they call Thief-Catchers with Business to find out next Day, and restore *for a Reward*, what they had stolen the Evening before. (MF, p. 326)

There is more than a hint of Wild to Moll's governess. As I have already noted, the Preface describes her having been, amongst other things,

a Receiver of Thieves, and of Thieves purchase, that is to say, of stolen Goods; and in a Word, her self a Thief, a Breeder up of Thieves, and the like, and yet at last a Penitent. (MF, p. 5)

² *The Political History of the Devil*, pp. 45, 373-4.

Wild may not have turned penitent or possessed the governess's instinct for when to desist from a particular practice and change guise; but for a while he displayed the knack of appearing to be the scourge of the criminal world, while actually cultivating and participating in it, of earning respectability by activities that are actually disreputable, which Defoe describes here with evident relish. Pat Rogers has noted that one of the chapbook adaptations of *Moll Flanders*, *Fortune's Fickle Distribution*, actually has the governess, now called Jenny Hackabout, employ Wild as the 'Head Clerk, or Chief Manager' of her business in stolen goods.³ Moll herself seems to aspire to Wild's status, showing a reluctance to be seen with common footpads and house-breakers, and priding herself on her ability to evade capture rather than on her crimes themselves. Her preference is for the more gradual, roundabout extraction of money from a victim *after* he has been robbed: such as when she collaborates with the governess in blackmailing the baronet; or when she exploits her wrongful apprehension for the break-in at the mercer's shop, which the governess describes to Moll as 'the best Bargain to you, that ever you made in your Life, if you manage it well' (*MF*, p. 248).

Colonel Jack also tends to give more attention to what Jack does with goods after they have been stolen than to the original act of theft. After Jack has been pestering his early partner-in-crime Robin to return a letter-case containing several bills that they have stolen from a man at the Custom-House, Robin finally agrees, but also suggests 'a way how the Gentleman shall have his Bills again, and you and I shall get a good deal of Money by it' (*CJ*, p. 30), reminding Jack that the clerk is offering a thirty pound reward for the case's return. Jack first returns to the house without any incriminating evidence on him, apparently acting only as a go-between for the actual thief, before arranging to bring the case the next day to the clerk's own house, where the victim is also present. Jack's apparent ignorance of money when he is handed the reward rouses the pity of the two

³ See Rogers, 'Moll in the Chapbooks', in *Literature and Popular Culture*, pp. 192-4.

gentlemen and the episode concludes with Jack investing the best part of his reward with the very gentleman who was originally robbed. Ironical details, such as when the gentleman shows surprise at Jack's pocket being 'whole' (*CJ*, p. 37), when it is one of his stolen bills that has enabled Jack to buy his coat and breeches, remind the reader that Jack was complicit in the crime which he is now turning to his advantage.

A while later, Jack's new accomplice Will approaches at a tavern a gentleman from whom Jack has stolen a pocket-book containing some bills and diamonds, claiming to have knowledge of its whereabouts, while insisting that he is not responsible for its theft. After much bargaining,

THEY then offer'd to give it him under their Hands, that they did not in the least Suspect him; that they would never Charge him with any thing about it; that they Acknowledg'd he went about to Enquire after the Goods at their Request; and that if he produced them, they would Pay him so much Money, at, and before the Delivery of them, without obliging him to Name or produce that Person he had them from. (*CJ*, p. 51)

Jack goes on to remark:

FOR all these things, they promiss'd first to give me what ever he agreed with the Thief to give him; not exceeding 50*l.* and to give him 50*l.* more for himself for procuring them. (*CJ*, p. 52)

Wild's livelihood rested on exactly such assurances. When Will returns the pocket-book and receives the rewards, he cunningly insists on only taking thirty of the fifty pounds due to Jack. Jack comments:

Till that time they were not quite without a secret Suspicion that he was the Thief, but that peice of policy cleared up his Reputation to them. (*CJ*, p. 53)

Both Will and Jack have made more from the pocket-book than if they had kept it, the bills and diamonds being worth so much that they would have risked arrest if they had tried to cash them publicly. At the same time, Jack, the real culprit, has been kept at a distance from the gentleman and his acquaintances, while Will has guaranteed his own freedom from suspicion. The episode ends with Will complacently lecturing the men on

the folly of leaving valuables lying around. However, Jack lacks the social status that enabled Wild to deal in stolen goods for so long: he is too obviously a likely thief to be able to invest a large amount of stolen money without risking suspicion. In time he finds that

I wanted a trusty Friend to commit it to, but where was such a one to be found by a poor Boy, bred up among Thieves? if I should have let any honest Body know that I had so much Money, they would have ask'd me how I came by it, and would have been afraid to take it into their Hands, least I being some time or other catch'd in my Rogueries, they should be counted the Receivers of stolen Goods, and the encouragers of a Thief. (*CJ*, pp. 58-9)

Both committing the crimes and attempting to profit from the return of the goods proves too much for Jack. Wild's genius lay in his use of other thieves to do the stealing and his acquisition of a social prestige, both of which convinced the public of his detachment from the criminal world.

So, *Moll Flanders* and *Colonel Jack* both evince an interest in the whole business of gaining from the return of stolen goods, and in particular the ability to act as a thief while appearing to the victim of the crime to be outside the criminal fraternity. The skill is a mutation of the political technique of manipulating an opponent while rendering oneself invulnerable to any such charge, which had long fascinated Defoe. For all these reasons, Defoe might have found Wild a tempting subject for a pamphlet.

The Life of Jonathan Wild is somewhat reminiscent of the popular Machiavellian lives of notorious statesmen which Defoe had absorbed at the end of the seventeenth century. The title-page indicates the work's preoccupation with the tactics that enabled Wild to have almost the entire criminal world dependent upon him, promising that it will disclose

by what Arts he made himself their HEAD, or GOVERNOR; his Discipline over them; his Policy and great Cunning in governing them; and the several Classes of THIEVES under his Command. In which all his INTRIGUES, PLOTS and ARTIFICES are accounted for, and laid open.

The Preface similarly declares at several points that, in the course of recounting the events of Wild's life, the pamphlet will focus upon 'his Art and Conduct in the Management of Things', will 'account for the Policy and Cunning of his Management'. The political analogy becomes quite explicit, as the author assures the readers that

here they will meet with a System of Politicks unknown to *Machiavel*; they will see deeper Stratagems and Plots form'd by a Fellow without Learning or Education, than are to be met with in the Conduct of the greatest Statesmen, who have been at the Heads of Governments.

Wild's challenge was much greater than that confronting politicians, because his subjects were lawless by profession:

To govern a Body of People who were Enemies to all Government; and to bring those under Obedience to him, who, at the Hazard of their Lives, acted in Disobedience to the Laws of the Land --- This was steering betwixt *Scylla* and *Charybdis*; and if he had not been a very skilful Pilot, he must long since have split up on a Rock, either on one Side or the other.⁴

Whoever is responsible for the pamphlet is certainly intimate with the vocabulary and hyperbolic mode of Machiavellian literature. Despite the author's distinction between Wild and the conventional statesman, Wild's role is similar to that of a minister like Oxford during 1710-14, who had to forge a foundation for his ministry from factions that at times seemed to be 'Enemies to all Government', being willing to risk their political lives in bringing down a ministry, if its successor offered them a better opportunity of tasting power.

The main account is predominantly concerned with Wild's character as a '*Machiavel* of Thieves' and touches on several themes that bring to mind Defoe's work. As the account conducts us through Wild's childhood, it makes much of his exceptional mental attributes, his character as 'a Man of Stratagem' rather than of force. He decides to

⁴ *The Life of Jonathan Wild* (London: T. Warner, 1725), Title-page, pp. v, vii, v-vi, vii.

leave an early manual job 'to transfer the Labour of his Hands to that of the Head'. Wild goes on to exploit the difficulty that thieves are experiencing in disposing of stolen goods, so that 'he became as useful to the Thieves as they were to him'. After a new law has been introduced offering a pardon to one thief for apprehending another, Wild's authority almost imperceptibly becomes 'absolute'. His achievement is in fact slightly reminiscent of Crusoe's claims for his status on the island: he manages to 'form and establish a Body of such lawless People into what we may call a Form of Government'; he is at once able to 'hang or save whom he pleas'd', and yet 'live not only in a Toleration, but even in a kind of Credit, amongst the People he was robbing every Day'.⁵

Later, when Wild justifies his use of such an elaborate system, he offers a view of the criminal world that is similar to the line taken by Defoe in his 1704 memorandum to Harley, which is echoed in the more general conclusions reached by Moll and Roxana about how women can best preserve their interests:

The World has grown so *peery*, (that was his Term for sharp) that ingenious Men (meaning Thieves) must have Recourse to Stratagems, or else they cou'd not get Bread.

Criminal society, like society more generally, has begun to resemble Hobbes's state of nature, as people stubbornly protect their own interests. Thieves have to outsmart the wealthy through more complex strategies, such as Wild's 'Confederacy', just as a minister can only hope to subdue political factions through a devious management. Wild also recognizes the importance of maintaining a good reputation even while he is manipulating both thieves and their victims: if a client pays for his services before he has returned the goods, he always scrupulously honours the agreement, knowing '*that Honesty was the best Policy*'.⁶ In these various ways, *The Life of Jonathan Wild* is compatible with the political ideas that are embedded in Defoe's criminal fiction.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 31, 3, 6, 16, 17, 21, 21-2, 20, 22.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 40, 41, 57.

The True and Genuine Account is similarly attracted to a Machiavellian portrayal of its subject. The Introduction suggests how Wild's system grew out of his perception that thieves only acted from self-interest:

He knew how common a bite among such people to save their own lives at the expense of their companions. But he was too cunning for that. And he had likewise a so much better trade in hand, by which he was sure to make a prey both of the persons robbed, and of the rogues that robbed them, that he would have been worse than lunatic if he had been drawn in to be a party.

Wild saw that he would have to appear to be serving the interests of the thief as much as the person robbed, even while remaining detached from the crime committed. This theme is explored further during the main text. As he was introduced to the criminal underworld by his partner Mary Milliner,

So he found ways to make himself as useful to them, as if he had gone abroad with them, which however he always avoided. Nor, indeed, had he any occasion to run a hazard himself, he finding himself as much a gainer in the part he acted, as if he had shared in the adventure. So that, in a word he had the profit without the danger; and politically kept himself from the last, on pretence of his increasing the first, by his art in managing for them. Thus without being a thief or a receiver, he brought a gain to himself, and his business went on prosperously.

Wild convinces the thieves that he is their ally, even a participant in their enterprises, when he is actually directing them and sharing their gain without ever exposing himself to the charge of complicity in their crimes. His achievement is offered to the reader as a kind of 'masterpiece of policy', comparable to, say, Oxford's feat of persuading high-fliers that they are influencing government policy, when in reality there are no grounds for such a charge and he is only using them to consolidate his own position. Although several thieves were caught, Wild and Milliner

always did their business so clean, with such subtlety, and so much to the advantage of the criminals, that it was of no use to them to charge him or her with anything.

Wild manipulates the thieves so indiscernibly, behind a facade of concern for their livelihood, that they never think of blaming his practice of returning the stolen goods for

the arrest of some of their fraternity. On several occasions, the account takes pleasure in appraising Wild's accomplishments in the exaggerated manner of the political biography or commentary. It remarks later:

If the correspondence he kept was large, if the number of his instruments was very great, his dexterity in managing them was indeed wonderful. And how cleverly he kept himself out of the reach of the act for receiving stolen goods ... is hardly to be imagined; and yet we find he was never charged home till now, notwithstanding so many felons who he exasperated to the last degree, and made desperate by falling upon them to their destruction.⁷

Wild's skill in making himself almost invulnerable against those whom he has manipulated is evaluated and marvelled at for the reader's diversion.

One device which enables Wild to give the impression to the victims of crime that he is simply a disinterested, well-meaning outsider is that of diverting attention from his reward for the return of the goods. Wild usually arranges with the person for the items to be delivered by a porter at a particular time and place.

But then it remains to be asked what Mr Wild expects for his pains in managing this nice part, who answers with an air of greatness, he leaves it to you; that he gets nothing by what is to be given the porter, that he is satisfied in being able to serve gentlemen in such a manner, so that it is in your breast to do what you think is handsome by Mr Wild.

The porter enables Wild not only to avoid contact with the stolen goods, but to make it seem that his gain from the episode has been bestowed upon him voluntarily by his client. Later, the author gives the specific example of Wild's transactions with a lady who had a watch with some diamonds and trinkets stolen at a church in Westminster. After these have been returned by the porter, the lady visits Wild,

⁷ *The True and Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of the Late Jonathan Wild* (London: John Applebee, 1725), reprinted in Henry Fielding, *The Life of Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great*, edited by David Nokes (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1982), pp. 227, 232, 232-3, 243. The pamphlet is discussed in Rogers, 'Grub Street Biography: Defoe and Others on Jonathan Wild', in *Literature and Popular Culture*, pp. 151-61.

and presents him with 15 guineas more. But with great difficulty made him accept of it; telling her it was a great deal too much; that he would not take it by any means, but at last accepts it, with the ceremony of saying he would not take it on account of the watch, but for having been at some trouble in serving her ladyship, in which she was pleased to reward him much more than he deserved.⁸

By appearing not to expect any remuneration, Wild extorts more from his client than he would have been able to charge for his services. This talent for putting those whom he is exploiting in a position of obligation to him is shared by Defoe's characters. When Moll's governess visits the baronet and offers to return the items which Moll has stolen, she is careful to 'leave the valuing it to himself' (*MF*, p. 234). Roxana uses a similar technique in her relationship with her wealthy, generous prince, boasting of how she 'manag'd him with such Art, that he generally anticipated my Demands' (*Rox*, p. 66).

Unless some external evidence for Defoe's authorship of these works emerges, it must be assumed that he did not write them. My aim here has not been to take issue with their de-attribution, but to show how their affinity with Defoe's political inclinations and criminal fiction has made their ascription to him seem persuasive. There are some grounds for believing that Defoe was interested in Wild, and he was certainly curious about the practice of profiting from the return of stolen goods, which depended upon the skill of disguising exploitation as altruism that had long fascinated him. Both these Lives are indebted to popular Machiavellism, borrowing the parlance and tone of the political biographies, memoirs and commentaries with which Defoe was well acquainted. But now that external evidence has rightly been established as the criterion for including a work in the Defoe canon, these two works are best taken as salutary reminders that Defoe was not alone in being attracted to Machiavellian literature nor in transposing its language and themes to a different popular genre.

NUMBER OF WORDS: 90, 866

⁸ *The True and Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of the Late Jonathan Wild*, pp. 244, 249.

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